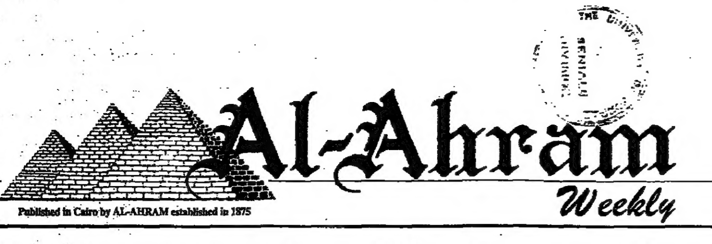


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Abdel-Rahman Mounif, portrait of the week by Bahgory 10



Hebron crime

SCORES of angry Palestinians took to the streets of Hebron yesterday, hurling stones, bottles and firebombs at Israeli troops in protest against the killing of three Palestinian labourers by Israeli soldiers Tuesday night. Israeli soldiers responded by firing rubber bullets, wounding more than 20 Palestinians.

A funeral for the workers was held in the village of Dura, where a one-day general strike was observed to be followed by a three-day mourning period.

The Israeli army began a full investigation into the incident and detained two Israeli soldiers who had opened fire on a van carrying a group of Palestinian construction workers who were returning from their jobs in Israel.

The soldiers claimed the van pulled out of a line of cars waiting to pass through a checkpoint at Dura, slightly injuring an Israel guard. Fearing a terrorist attack, the two soldiers opened fire with automatic weapons, killing three Palestinians and wounding several others, AFP reported. The commander of the Israeli forces in the West Bank admitted the driver of the van had no intention of running over the guard and that the soldiers did not fire warning shots according to the rules of engagement.

Palestinian President Yasser Arafat condemned the shooting as a "big crime against innocent labourers." Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu phoned Arafat to express his condolences. Ahmed Korei, the speaker of the Palestinian parliament, said the shooting was an invitation to violence at a time when the peace process was facing a serious crisis.

Key step

A SENIOR UN official, the Sri Lankan diplomat Jayantha Dhanpala, arrived in Baghdad yesterday to assemble a group of diplomats that will escort UN teams on inspection of Iraqi presidential palaces. His visit was a key step in carrying out the Iraqi-UN agreement that resolved a four-month stand-off over inspecting the palaces, AP reported.

On Tuesday a US Pentagon spokesman greeted the completion of a six-day inspection mission by UN weapons experts and said it has expanded the reach of the inspectors, but he added that there were still unanswered questions about Iraq's programmes for weapons of mass destruction.

Meanwhile UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan began a two-day visit to Washington yesterday to appeal for the UN funding and defend his deal with Iraq. Annan will be dealing mostly with supportive officials of the Clinton administration and does not plan to meet congressional leaders, some of whom have reacted sceptically to the UN-Iraqi deal.

Plane crash

AN EGYPTIAN Boeing 707 cargo plane crashed and burst into flames at Kenya's Moi International Airport Tuesday, killing all six crew members, AFP reported.

Kenyan Airport officials said the Air Memphis plane was flying from the northern Tanzanian Lake Victoria town of Mwanza to Cairo carrying a cargo of fish fillets. As it took off after a refuelling stop, one of its wheels hit the perimeter fence, sending the plane plunging into a valley 500 metres away where it burst into flames.

Two people on the ground were slightly injured by debris, which scattered over a wide area around the crash site.

Unmoved by Netanyahu's 'charm'

Netanyahu's European 'charm offensive' left Paris and the Arabs cold. Meanwhile, Washington appeared to be working on 'new ideas'

The Clinton administration is said to be "refining" a proposal for a second Israeli redeployment in the West Bank to run in tandem with a Palestinian undertaking to continue the fight against terrorism more forcefully.

The new US initiative is said to have been strongly opposed by Israel. The Palestinians, for their part, have insisted that, in line with the Oslo Accords, there should be a clear timetable for two successive redeployments, Hassan Abdel-Rahman, the PLO representative in Washington, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

He said the proposed redeployment would cover 13.1 per cent of the West Bank's total area, but added: "We don't know if this will be followed by another withdrawal and if so, how large this would be."

An administration official told the *Weekly* that Secretary of State Madeleine Albright "has been actively engaged in an internal process to try to see whether there are steps we can take to revitalise the increasingly moribund Middle East peace process, as neither of the parties is making the hard decisions that need to be taken."

Although the official said that "we're looking at ways to revitalise" the process, he admitted that the recent American attempt to narrow the gap had obviously not borne fruit.

Another official said that Albright is putting together a new approach in order to persuade the two sides to live up to their commitments, and may even go public, in a speech to be delivered soon, on the American view of what is needed now.

Such a gesture would clearly be meant to put pressure on Binyamin Netanyahu. But the Israeli prime minister's envoys to Washington have been running round in the last few days calling on everyone — Congressional leaders, Jewish groups, the media — and would appear to have succeeded in preventing such a move, at least for the moment.

According to informed sources, the Clinton administration is willing to engage seriously with the problem once again. "But the big question is how forceful they can be, how can they enforce their ideas," a source said.

Arab diplomats in Washington, however, are sceptical that the latest American activity will translate into effective pressure on Netanyahu.

Jordan's King Hussein, who met with President Hosni Mubarak in Cairo last Sunday, is scheduled to have talks with President Bill Clinton next Thursday in Washington.

According to Marawan Muasher, the Jordanian ambassador to Washington, the monarch agreed with President Mubarak and the Palestinians that Israel has to honour its commitments for the transitional period before the parties can move to the final status negotiations.

Aron Miller, Deputy Special Middle East coordinator, said: "Washington must obviously address the needs of both parties if an agreement is to be reached. The costs and consequences of failure are too great to imagine."

As the administration was working on its new approach, Israel launched a "charm offensive" in Europe and simultaneously detonated a diplomatic depth-charge in their relations with Lebanon by offering a unilateral, but conditional, withdrawal from the "security zone" in the south of the country.

In a letter to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Israel's Ambassador Dore Gold quoted Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai as saying Israel was prepared to implement the withdrawal envisaged in the UN Security Council's Resolution 425, "but only within a framework that will ensure the implementation of all elements of the resolution." These include "implementation of UNIFIL's expressly stated goal of restoring international peace and security and assisting the Government of Lebanon in ensuring the return of its effective authority in the area."

Because of its traditional ties with Lebanon, Paris was chosen as the focal point for Netanyahu's "charm offensive."

"France has an influence on events in Lebanon. I think it is our responsibility to find a process, but at the same time maintain our right to fight in south Lebanon, where we are needed to defend northern Israel," Mordechai said after a one-hour meeting with French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine.

Asked about Israel's new proposals, Mordechai said Tel Aviv can indeed envisage a "redeployment" of its forces from Lebanon, but only on condition that there would be no threat of "terrorism" along its borders, a clear reference to the activities of Hizbollah. "If the Lebanese can guarantee peace and security on our international borders, we can retreat. If not, we have to [guarantee] our security by continuing to fight in southern Lebanon," he added.

Analysts said Mordechai wanted to speak to the French because Paris has gone on record as saying it is prepared to provide security guarantees between Israel and Lebanon.

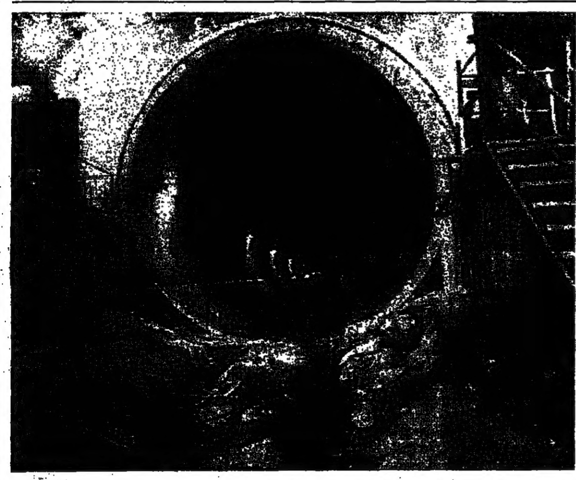
"The French position remains the same: we will do nothing which does not have the agreement of both sides, on the one hand; and on the other, we are prepared to participate in a peace-keeping force, but only in the framework of a comprehensive regional peace process," explained a French diplomat.

"Paris is ready to listen, to talk, to transmit messages, to help and provide services," observed Vedrine.

But for many Western and Arab experts, there was no doubt that the new Israeli diplomatic bombshell was aimed more at Damascus than at Beirut. Thus far, Syria's substantial presence in Lebanon has been justified in one way or another. But what if Israel were to withdraw? What would Syria do then with its 40,000 soldiers stationed in Lebanon?

A return to the status quo ante is now unthinkable. The Israelis do not really care whether Lebanon is colonised by Syria. The only thing they are interested in is the security of their northern border after their departure from the security zone. And, as one Arab analyst pointed out, they know fine well they cannot have security without Syria. *(see p.6)*

***Hoda Tawfik** in Washington,*
***Safa Haeri** in Paris*







photos: Khaled El-Fiqi

The work of a latterday Nefertiti, the name given to the drilling machine used to construct the subway, has resulted in the first tunnel to go beneath the Nile, left. When the new subway opens, it will have a dramatic effect on Cairo's public transport

Transports of delight

By the beginning of the 21st century the governorates of Cairo, Giza and Qalyubiya will be connected by a subway. Rehab Saad descends 20 metres underground

Construction has been completed on the tunnel and stations serving the third and fourth phases of the second Greater Cairo underground line. The third connects Tahrir Square with Cairo University while the fourth links the latter with the Giza railway station.

The five-kilometre-long third phase will be opened next year and the fourth, three kilometres long, in the year 2001. By then, the governorates of Cairo, Giza and Qalyubiya will have been connected by a subway for the first time. The second line starts at Shubra El-Kheima, runs through Ramses, Ataba and Tahrir squares and then crosses below the Nile to Giza.

The third phase is to be served by three underground stations at Al-Gezira, Dokki and the Research Institute (*Al-Bohouth*) and a surface station at Cairo University.

The completion of the fourth phase will make the main railway station at Ramses Square partly redundant. Passengers coming from southern Egypt will disembark at Giza and then use the underground. Those coming from northern Egypt will get off at Shubra El-Kheima and take the underground as well, Abdel-Latif Sherif, chief construction engineer, said.

Hani Balqash, an engineer at the Gezira station, explained how the 380-metre-long tunnel below the Nile, the first of its kind, was constructed to connect Cairo and Giza. He said a giant borer, Nefertiti, began by digging at a point 70 metres from Al-Gala'a Bridge, 10 metres below the bed of the Nile. It then moved below Al-Horreya Park on the right side of Tahrir Street in Dokki, the Opera House and the Moukhtar Museum until it reached the Gezira station. Nefertiti then continued digging below the main branch of the Nile to the right of Qasr El-Nil Bridge until it reached Tahrir Square.

"In the first and second phases of the second line, from Shubra El-Kheima to Tahrir Square, there was a lot of work to do. This is why we used two borers, Nefertiti and Hatshepsut," Sherif said. "But since the distance from Tahrir Square to Giza is short, one machine was enough. We sent Hatshepsut back to France and used just Nefertiti, which has completed its work and is being kept in store."

According to officials at the Underground Authority, the number of passengers using the second line will rise to 1.5 million daily once the third phase is completed, and to 1.7 million with the completion of the fourth phase. The trip from Shubra El-Kheima to Cairo University will take 25 minutes.

Elevators and escalators will be available for the elderly and disabled. "These are generally available in most phases of the second line," Sherif said. There is also a control room at Mubarak station below Ramses Square.

"It can operate the train without a driver. It can stop the train if any danger signals appear on the screen. The second line is completely safe," Sherif said.

Passengers who wish to use the first line, connecting Helwan with Marg, can change trains at Mubarak or Sadat station, below Tahrir Square. "They can use one ticket for the two lines," Sherif said.

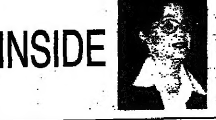
In constructing the second line, experts avoided mistakes that were made in building the first. "Before starting work, we surveyed the area and relocated all public utilities such as electricity cables and water pipes," Sherif said. "This was not done on the first line. We had no idea of the locations of these utilities; and that resulted in some damage."

The method of construction was also changed. "For the first line, the cut-and-cover technique was used, meaning that streets, or parts of them, were disemboweled, whereas in the second line, Hatshepsut and Nefertiti were used, making it possible for us to do the digging without disrupting traffic."

The financing of the second line was entirely Egyptian. "For the first line we took foreign loans which had to be paid back in hard currency. This time, the Ministry of Transport put up the money. However, we also took loans from some Egyptian banks," Sherif said.

A third line under study will run from Imbaba, north of Giza, to Darrassa and Salah Salem Street in eastern Cairo, a distance of 8.5 kilometres.

Constructing an underground for Alexandria is also being considered.



Toning down 'the yellow press'

Responding to a call by President Mubarak, the Supreme Press Council together with the Press Syndicate have embarked on a programme of action to contain the excesses of the "yellow press". **Shaden Shehab** reviews the call to order and examines its immediate consequences



President Mubarak during the meeting with the Supreme Press Council

After a meeting this week between President Hosni Mubarak and the Supreme Press Council, at which the president complained that some journalists were stepping so far out of line that their actions could constitute a danger to the freedom of the press, the Council responded Sunday with a whole series of decisions designed to ensure that journalists respect the integrity of their profession.

The Council, chaired by Shura Council Speaker Mustafa Kamal Helmi, began by deciding to revoke the licences of all newspapers which failed to appear within three months from the date on which their licence was granted. Licenced newspapers which appear irregularly will be investigated by a sub-committee and the results of the investigation will be put before the Council for its decision.

The Council also decided to commission a detailed study of the Journalistic Code of Honour, which was prepared by the Press Syndicate, prior to its ratification, and three committees were asked to draft executive statutes for the current press law.

In addition, the Council decided to undertake follow-up assessments of the contents of licenced newspapers and issue periodic reports on the extent to which their commitment to the ethics of the profession and to the Code of Journalistic Honour is borne out by their work. Newspapers will be obliged to publish these reports, as well as any replies or corrections received from readers in response to published stories.

In a statement, the Council said that a survey of existing licences showed that several newspapers which had obtained licences had in fact never appeared on the newstands. According to Article 48 of Law 96 for 1996, a licence should be considered null and void if the newspaper does not appear within three months of the date on which the licence was granted.

There were other newspapers, the statement added, which having obtained licences had published only irregularly. These will be investigated by a sub-committee in order to determine their legal status, and the findings will be submitted to the Council.

This flurry of activity followed a meeting on Saturday between Mubarak and the Council, at which the president spoke bitterly about the way in which some journalists were prepared to go beyond all boundaries of decency, honesty and taste in order to sell papers. Yet he vowed that no restrictions would be imposed on the freedom of the press, "other than those enshrined in law and in the conscience of the journalist."

The president cited a number of recent articles by the editors of leading Egyptian newspapers, in which they had warned that the freedom of the press must be balanced by the responsibility of the journalist.

He began by quoting at length from an article by Ibrahim Nafie, editor-in-chief of *Al-Ahram*. Nafie had written, "When freedom becomes irresponsibility, then the Third World will quickly find itself falling prey to anarchistic and fascistic trends, and we will be confronted by a society in which intellectual blackmail, mental thuggery and moral intimidation prevail... We are not calling on journalists to cover up corruption. We are not demanding that restrictions be placed on the freedom of the press... We are warning against the actions of a minority who are insidiously diverting the nation from its true humanistic objectives... There is a clear distinction between construction and destruction, between responsible freedom and destructive anarchy..."

Mubarak then continued by citing an article by Gamal Badawi, editor-in-chief of *Al-Wafd*, in which Badawi drew on the classical distinction between freedom and licence to justify regulation while condemning arbitrary repression of the press.

The president expanded on this point at some length. Egyptian expatriates, he said, were saddened by much of what was being published in the so-called "yellow press" because it presented a false and denigratory image of Egypt. He singled out for criticism the non-partisan weekly *Al-Destour*, which has been suspended for publishing a statement of dubious authenticity, allegedly issued by the clandestine Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya, warning three Coptic businessmen to leave the country or pay with their lives.

The president then cited a passage from an article by Said Abdel-Khalek, assistant editor-in-chief of *Al-Wafd*, in which he castigated those newspapers which elect to play the roles of prosecutor, judge and executioner, and asked where the responsibility for such distasteful antics might lie. In particular, Abdel-Khalek asked whether the Supreme Press Council and the Information Ministry were fulfilling their constitutional responsibilities.

Al-Wafd reported that Mubarak was particularly angered by these accusations, and told the Council: "You are putting me in a very difficult situation. It is your responsibility to act. What are you waiting for?"

The president alluded to one opposition party which had, incredibly, been issued with 25 press licences. He went on to remind both the Press Syndicate and the Supreme Press Council of their responsibilities in the strongest possible terms. His words were meant to galvanise these agencies into immediate and decisive action. As he told his listeners: "I am against restricting the freedom of the press. Criticism is permissible within the limits established by the law. But the press should be a mainstay of social ethics. If the present situation continues, we will find ourselves staring disaster in the face."

The effects of this call to arms were immediate. Not only did the Supreme Press Council immediately decide on the measures reported above, but the Press Syndicate also sprang straight into action. "We have already made a start," Makram Mohamed Ahmed, the Syndicate's chairman, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. He said that the editors-in-chief of two newspapers, whose names he would not divulge, have been referred to the prosecutor-general for "invading the private lives of public figures, libellously and without justification." A third editor-in-chief is also being questioned by a committee of the Syndicate, Ahmed said.

Meanwhile, a professional ethics committee has been formed to hear and adjudicate complaints from readers, Ahmed said. If it is found there is a case to answer, the journalist will be referred to a disciplinary board and may be expelled from the Syndicate, he added.

Following on from the suspension of *Al-Destour*, Adel Hammouda, deputy editor-in-chief of *Rose El-Youssef* magazine, which also published the statement targeting the Coptic businessmen, has been re-assigned to *Al-Ahram*.

Other journalists are facing libel charges. Magdi Hussein, editor-in-chief of *Al-Shaab*, the mouthpiece of the Islamist-oriented Labour Party, was the first to be convicted. He is to serve a year's imprisonment for slandering Alaa El-Alfi, son of former Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi.

The prosecutor-general has ordered the trial of three executives of the *Misr El-Fatah* newspaper, the mouthpiece of the Young Egypt Party, for publishing an article which was "insulting" to Finance Minister Mohieddin El-Gharib. The article alleged that the minister was guilty of corruption.

The prosecutor also brought charges against the editor-in-chief of *Al-Nabaa* newspaper for publishing an article alleging that the wife of Minister of *Al-Awqaf* (religious endowments) Hamdi Zaqzouq was Jewish and that she ran the ministry's affairs from behind the scenes.

A doctor who worked as a reporter for *Al-Watan Al-Arabi* newspaper has been arrested on charges of blackmailing businessmen. He is to be tried for extortion.

The Shura Council also stripped Mohamed Abdel-Aal, editor-in-chief of *Al-Watan Al-Arabi*, of his immunity — thus exposing him to investigation in connection with at least four libel charges.

Speaking to the *Weekly*, the editor of one non-partisan newspaper was at pains to defend the practices of Egypt's version of the tabloid press. "I am against the publication of sensational stories, but the authorities concerned should bear in mind that running a newspaper requires a good deal of money, especially since many newspapers have to print abroad because of the restrictions imposed," he said. "I tried to run a proper newspaper at first, but it didn't sell. Then I put more juicy items in, and it sold well. We even started to get more advertisements. It's a tough business. We need people to guide us and help us find the right path."

Salama Ahmed Salama, a highly respected columnist for *Al-Ahram*, argued that although measures should be taken against the "yellow press", the restrictions should be less severe than those that have suddenly and drastically emerged this week. "We should not expect to establish a responsible press overnight. It has to be a gradual process. If they can exercise their freedom and if the penalties imposed on them when they err are reasonable, then journalists can learn to distinguish right from wrong."

Salama added: "Even if some publications may have gone beyond all reasonable limits, there was no need to take such repressive measures. The Supreme Press Council and the Press Syndicate are to blame. It is their passivity in the past which has paved the way for these measures."

However, Syndicate Chairman Ahmed insisted that the latest measures were meant "to correct present excesses, not to muzzle the press."

Ahmed told the *Weekly* that all those present at the Press Council meeting had been unanimous that there was no need to amend the current press law. "We even intend, as soon as it is appropriate, to try and obtain the cancellation of those provisions in the law which seek jail terms for offending journalists," Ahmed said.

He added, "We [journalists] have harmed ourselves. Those who stood by us during the crisis triggered by Law 93 are undoubtedly disappointed and perhaps they even regret having shown solidarity at that time. The freedom we fought for has unfortunately been abused."

Law 93 of 1995 stipulated tough penalties for journalists found guilty under its articles. After stiff opposition from the Press Syndicate, the law was repealed and another press law was passed in 1996. Under this law, libel is punishable by a maximum of one year's imprisonment and/or a fine ranging between LE1,000 and LE5,000. If the victim of the libel is a public official or the matter relates to public duties, the maximum penalty is two years' imprisonment and/or a fine ranging between LE5,000 and LE20,000.

Al-Shaab editor imprisoned

The chief editor of an opposition newspaper has become the first Egyptian journalist to be jailed in connection with a libel suit. **Khaled Dawoud** reports on Magdi Hussein's arrest upon his return from Damascus and attempts to reach an out-of-court settlement

Magdi Hussein, chief editor of the twice-weekly *Al-Shaab*, mouthpiece of the Islamist-oriented Labour Party, was arrested by police on Sunday night at Cairo International Airport as soon as he stepped down from a Syrian Airlines flight that brought him home from Damascus.

"They knew I was coming," Hussein told *Al-Ahram Weekly* on Monday. "They took me in a car which was waiting close to the plane. We left from one of the airport's back gates to the Cairo Security Department."

The day after his arrest, Hussein stood trial again for one of eight libel lawsuits filed by former Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi and his family against *Al-Shaab*. An appeals court last week upheld a one-year prison sentence passed against Hussein for slandering El-Alfi's son, Alaa, by publishing allegations that he used his father's influence to acquire property and amass wealth illegally. Mohamed Hilal, a cartoonist for *Al-Shaab*, was also sentenced to one year in jail on similar charges.

Hussein had earlier been given a suspended sentence of one year's imprisonment in another libel suit filed by El-Alfi's son. As a result, his lawyers said, he may have to spend up to two years in jail.

Hussein was in Tehran when last week's sentence was handed down. His colleague, Hilal, who is in hiding, is said to be planning to surrender to police soon.

Lawyers for Hussein and El-Alfi said that attempts to reach an out-of-court settlement were deadlocked. El-Alfi wants a printed apology for all the allegations made by *Al-Shaab*, while the newspaper is ready to admit that only some of its reports were false.

Hussein's lawyers are now acting in three directions: filing an appeal with the Court of Cassation; demanding from the prosecutor-general a suspension of the jail sentence until the Court of Cassation reaches a decision; and filing another request with the prosecutor-general for Hussein's transfer from prison to hospital for alleged health problems.

Under Egyptian law, courts are empowered to send journalists to jail if they are convicted of publication offences. But this marks the first time in recent memory that a jail sentence has been enforced in such a case.

Journalists, in their campaign against tough penalties for publication offences included in a short-lived 1995 law, demanded the abolition of jail sentences altogether, suggesting heftier fines and disciplinary action by the Press Syndicate. But the imprisonment penalty remained when the press law was modified in 1996.

For the past two years, *Al-Shaab* published several allegations that questioned the honesty and integrity of El-Alfi and his two sons, Alaa and Adel.

El-Alfi kept quiet for weeks, then filed a libel lawsuit against Hussein and five other journalists working for *Al-Shaab*. The prosecutor-general later imposed a news blackout on the case.

El-Alfi was removed from office following the massacre of 58 tourists by terrorists in Luxor last November. Following his dismissal, attempts started to arrange an out-of-court settlement between the two sides. *Al-Shaab* also toned down its criticism of the government, arguing that the deadlock in the Middle East peace process and the US-Iraq showdown made it mandatory on all nationalist parties to back the positions taken by President Hosni Mubarak.

During the court hearing on Monday, Labour Party Secretary-General Adel Hussein, who is Magdi Hussein's uncle, revealed details of last-minute attempts to reach a settlement. He accused El-Alfi of taking a hard-line position after Magdi Hussein was sentenced to jail, claiming that the fact that he was in prison "would make him more willing to accept a compromise."

The presiding judge, Ibrahim Shabana, also came out strongly in favour of a settlement. "Is there no good sign yet to end this dispute?" he inquired from lawyers of the two sides. Both confirmed their wish to reach a settlement, but blamed each other for the stalemate.

El-Alfi's lawyer, Fathi Ragab, said that despite the harm inflicted upon his client and his family, "he accepted the principle of reconciliation, but only if the newspaper published an apology. If that is not done, there will be no settlement. He cannot give up his dignity, reputation and honour after being called a thief and a thug."

Al-Shaab lawyers responded that they cannot accept such a formula "because we will not sacrifice our credibility," said Adel Eid, a lawyer for *Al-Shaab*.

The judge repeatedly appealed to the lawyers to work out a settlement "satisfactory to both parties." He added: "You are professional lawyers and I am sure you can agree on a wording by means of which each side will make concessions and meet the other halfway."

The judge then postponed hearings until 3 July to give the lawyers time to work out an agreement. If and when a settlement is reached, the jail sentence against Hussein will be dropped.

Labour Party supporters shouted "long live freedom of the press, long live Magdi Hussein," when he was escorted to a civilian car to take him back to prison. He was not handcuffed.

ZEIN

Al-Destour denied Egyptian licence

An administrative court has turned down a request by the independent *Al-Destour* newspaper for an Egyptian licence. **Amira Ibrahim** reports

Less than two weeks after the suspension of the non-partisan weekly *Al-Destour*, on Tuesday an administrative court turned down its application for an Egyptian licence. The newspaper had previously been published on the authority of a Cypriot licence, but was permitted to print on Egyptian territory.

In rejecting the application, the court cited a new Companies Law, passed in January, that makes the cabinet's approval a precondition for the establishment of any joint stock company in the areas of press publications, satellite broadcasting and remote sensing.

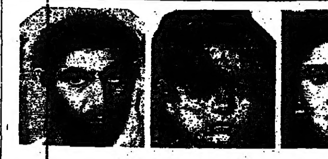
Al-Destour was suspended after it published a dubious statement, allegedly issued by the underground Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya, threatening three Coptic businessmen with death unless they left the country. Many analysts questioned the authenticity of the statement, and argued that it might have been a fake planted by business rivals of the putative "victims".

Al-Destour's lawyer, Ahmed Shukeir, complained that the Court invoked the new Companies Law, although the application for an Egyptian licence was made by the newspaper six months before this law took effect. Speaking to *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Shukeir vowed to file an appeal with the Higher Administrative Court.

Chief Editor Ibrahim Eissa also affirmed that they were determined to acquire an Egyptian licence. "We are determined to exercise our right to publish our newspaper," he said. "We applied for a licence under the old Companies Law, and we are going to do so again under the new law. If the application is turned down, we will take the matter to a higher court."

Gamal Fahmi, the newspaper's managing editor, said the opposition Liberal Party of Mustafa Kamel Murad had offered to "host" *Al-Destour* as one of the party's newspapers, by "loaning" it a temporary licence. "We accepted the offer but the procedure was rejected by the Supreme Press Council," Fahmi said.

ZEIN









Living faces of antiquity

Last Sunday Mrs Suzanne Mubarak inaugurated an exhibition of Fayoum portraits at the Mohamed Khalil Museum. **Rania Khallaf** was there

Visitors to an exhibition of mummy portraits, known as the Fayoum portraits, stood silently in awe looking at the paintings and pondering the secrets of life, death and resurrection. Particularly interesting to the audience was the portrait of a man named Sarpas, pictured with thick black hair, a short beard and brown eyes filled with sadness. The exhibition, at the Horizon One hall in the Mohamed Khalil Museum, was inaugurated on Sunday night by Mrs Suzanne Mubarak.

"It is no exaggeration to say that these portraits illustrate people coming from the past to talk to us, arouse our curiosity and persuade us to return with them to the Fayoum oases, in the middle of the first century, when three of the greatest civilisations, Egyptian, Greek and Roman, intermingled to produce the Fayoum portraits," said Culture Minister Farouk Hosni.

Work on the LE1.5 million Horizon One hall, covering 560 square metres, began in February 1996. The most modern exhibiting techniques were used. On display are 35 exhibits, including the portraits and two mummies which date back to between the first and fourth centuries AD. They were discovered in the late 19th century.

"The idea of the portraits, which depict the faces of dead people, represents one stage in the development of the concept of resurrection, the core of Ancient Egyptian religion," said Ahmed Nawwar, head of the museums sector at the Ministry of Culture. "We chose to begin with the exhibition of faces in Fayoum because of their importance in the history of art. Presenting these works is a rediscovery of their value and the pioneering role of the Ancient Egyptian artist."

Nawwar added that many Western countries requested to host the exhibition. Vienna probably will be the next venue in 1999.

"The importance of these portraits, which represent an intrinsically local school of art, derives from the fact that they constitute a key chapter in the history of art because they are the only models available to us," Nawwar said.

Samir Gharib, head of the ministry's Cultural Development Fund, said the viewer of these portraits will find himself "standing between two worlds: life and death."

The portraits are believed to have been painted during the lifetime of their subjects and later cut to fit the sarcophagus.

"Despite the unique characteristics of these faces, they were neglected for a long time by both historians and art critics," Gharib said. "And even though the portraits were categorised as part of Coptic art, scholars of this particular art ignored them. So it is a significant step that this spectacular heritage has been rediscovered." Gharib added that the portraits and Coptic icons share common features.

Following the inauguration of Horizon One, Mrs Mubarak met with Culture Minister Hosni to discuss plans for preserving the architectural style of Islamic monuments in the old districts of Cairo. According to Hosni, the first stage will cover four areas: El-Gamaliya, El-Moez Street, El-Darb El-Ahmar and Sayeda Zeinab. The four-year project will cost LE170 million.

West African bonanza

Foreign Minister Amr Moussa's west African tour ushers in a new era of economic relations between Egypt and its continent, writes **Gamal Nkrumah**

Foreign Minister Amr Moussa embarked on an African tour last week aimed at strengthening political ties and expanding economic exchange between Egypt and west African countries.

Moussa had earlier toured east and southern Africa in April and August of 1997, and the results of his earlier African trips are bearing much fruit.

Moussa's west African tour comes at a time when the African continent is experiencing an economic boom. Africa's per capita growth rate was five per cent in 1997, up from 1 per cent in 1992 and negative growth rates in the late 1980s. The pace of change needs to quicken, though. The continent has a population growth rate of three per cent, the world's highest, and the west African region has a population of 350 million — potentially an enormous market for Egyptian exports.

As sweeping economic reforms get under way in much of west Africa, Egypt is encouraging its businessmen to invest in a potentially lucrative market. Egypt's trade deficit with the rest of Africa stands at $632 million annually, but the volume of trade between Egypt and west Africa is small, accounting for a mere $500,000. The west African countries visited by Moussa imported goods worth $7 billion last year. West African countries import a wide range of consumer products, especially textiles, clothing footwear and pharmaceuticals. Cocoa, coffee and timber are Egypt's main imports from west Africa.

West Africans hope that Egypt will start to import a wider range of products from the region. "At present trade between Egypt and Ghana is insignificant but we hope that after Amr Moussa's trip that more Egyptian businessmen will invest in the Tema Industrial Zone, where export-processing factories are located," Major General Anthony Kwabena Twumasi, the Ghanaian ambassador to Egypt told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

"We hope that Egypt will import canned tuna and other fish and agricultural products," Twumasi said. Ghana, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire and to a lesser extent the other west African countries produce a wide variety of agricultural produce and the region, blessed with abundant water resources, is considered fertile ground for agro-business, and the production of exotic tropical fruit such as pineapples and papaya for the Middle Eastern and European markets.

Some 45 businessmen from the construction, food and pharmaceutical industries accompanied Moussa on his west African trip. Over 40 trade agreements for the promotion of trade and investment and the scrapping of double taxation were signed. Double taxation is one of the major obstacles to the expansion of trade between Egypt and west African countries. Egypt is seeking preferential agreements with west African nations and hopes to double its exports to west Africa this year. Ghana, the most populous of the seven countries visited by Moussa, is richly endowed with natural resources such as timber, gold, diamonds and bauxite. It is envisaged as Egypt's main trading partner in west Africa.

Côte d'Ivoire, one of west Africa's most prosperous and economically thriving countries, is also considered a key partner for trade in the region. Moussa's trip to Côte d'Ivoire was preceded by the visits of Health Minister Ismail Sallam and Trade Minister Ahmed El-Goweili, during which three trade agreements were signed. Côte d'Ivoire, which only produces eight per cent of its pharmaceutical needs, is viewed as a promising new market for Egyptian medicines.

The smaller and poorer countries of west Africa are also in dire need of Egyptian technical expertise and medical assistance. The Senegalese ambassador to Cairo, Hassan Bassiro Diouf, told the *Weekly* that, "putting emphasis on private sector investment as the key path to growth does not mean that traditional Egyptian assistance to African nations through the Egyptian Fund for Technical Cooperation with Africa (FECTA) must stop."

Egypt Air flies directly to the Nigerian cities of Kano and Lagos, as well as to the respective Ghanaian and Côte d'Ivoirian capitals Accra and Abidjan, but there are few air links to most other countries of the region — another difficulty hindering trade expansion between Egypt and west Africa. Plans to set up regular sea links between Alexandria and several west African ports, financed by the African Development Bank, were shelved because of the small volume of trade between Egypt and west Africa. But, as trade prospects improve, the possibility exists that more transport and communications links will be established.

The so-called "market women", the petty traders who sell their goods along the west African coastal markets, account for much of the trade between Egypt and Ghana. Their brisk business, not officially accounted for, constitutes mainly of Egyptian clothing and footwear, cosmetics and perfumes.

Timber and cocoa are Ghana's main exports to Egypt. But Ghanaian cocoa is not sold directly to Egypt, but through a third party in London under the terms of the International Cocoa Agreement. Even cocoa products, like cocoa butter which is widely used in the cosmetics industry, is not sold directly to Egypt. Only cocoa powder, used in the manufacturing of chocolate, is sold directly to Egypt.

There are numerous cumbersome and counter-productive financial regulations that make trading relations difficult between African states. Furthermore, the fragmented and incoherent structure of African banking systems, plus red tape and bureaucratic constraints in both Egypt and other African countries, act as a deterrent to increased trade. Moreover, there is a perception in some African quarters that Egypt dumps its shoddy goods, those that cannot be exported to Europe and America, on Africa.

"A lot depends on how west African countries perceive the help given by Egypt," a Cairo-based African diplomat, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told the *Weekly*.

Left divided by position on Islamists

The idea of political coordination with the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood threatens dissension within the ranks of the leftist Tagammu Party. **Fatemah Farag** reports

On 17 May 1993 the leftist Tagammu Party adopted a programme for the "comprehensive confrontation of terrorism" — politically, culturally and economically. At the same time, the party's mouthpiece, *Al-Ahali*, began a verbal onslaught against "terrorists", a term that was meant to include the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood.

However, this position came under criticism, from inside the party and also from independent leftist intellectuals, who feared that Tagammu might be falling in the government's lap. "We should confront terrorism, but not by embracing the government and not by condoning anti-democratic practices," said Nabil El-Hilali, a veteran human rights lawyer and prominent Marxist figure. "These practices are being used against those whom you consider to be your enemies but tomorrow they will be used against you."

Hussein Abdel-Razeq, a top party figure, even commented: "*Al-Ahali* talks about the phenomenon of terrorism as if nothing else was going on."

But irrespective of *Al-Ahali's* editorial policy, Tagammu's attitude towards the Muslim Brotherhood was never clear cut. During the past years, joint statements were issued repeatedly by opposition parties and groups, including the Tagammu and the Brotherhood.

Yet the idea of systematic political coordination with the Brotherhood could be a focal point of contention within Tagammu ranks. The problem was brought to the fore by the ongoing discussion of a draft political report which affirms "the right of all political forces to establish their own parties according to any terms of reference they choose, be they liberal, socialist or religious."

If approved by the party's central committee at a meeting scheduled for 18 March, this report will be one of the basic documents that will be submitted to the party's Fourth General Congress to be held in the second half of July.

At the party's Third General Congress in 1992, three basic positions had emerged. The first, advocated by Rifaat El-Said, the party's secretary-general, opposed any cooperation with the Brotherhood and rejected its right to establish a political party. The second, supported by Hussein Abdel-Razeq and Abdel-Ghaffar Shukr, affirmed, on the other hand, that the Tagammu, ever since its establishment, supported the "right of all political forces to establish political parties without any constraints." The third position, taken by party leader Khaled Mohieddin, accepted the argument put forward by the second group but cautioned that the party would be making a mistake if it supported the Brotherhood's "right" to establish a political party at this time. Mohieddin expressed the fear that Islamist militants might rush to join the proposed party.

The Fourth Congress, it seems likely, will open a Pandora's box of contentious issues, not just the question of Tagammu's position on Islamism. "We have not amended our party programme since 1980, although there were many domestic, regional and international developments in the past 18 years which make it necessary to undertake this effort today," explained Abdel-Razeq.

A year ago, a committee was established to consider the proposed changes in the party's programme. The result was a book entitled *Egypt and the Issues of the Future*, which included studies by prominent party figures such as Ismail Sabri Abdallah and Amina Shafik on subjects ranging from the definition of socialism, the conditions of Egyptian peasants and water and energy resources.

The basic documents that will be submitted to the Fourth Congress will include the political report, a new draft party programme and a report on ways of restructuring the party.

Some party members believe that a climate more conducive to cooperation with the Brotherhood was generated last year, particularly during the Democracy Conference, held in December. "This conference provided an opportunity for those who had not sat down together for years to meet and talk," said Abdel-Razeq, the party's coordinator. "Samir Fayyad [the party official responsible for the Cairo Governorate] sat for the first time with people like Montasser El-Zayyat [an Islamist lawyer close to militant Islamists]. Even if people disagreed, they felt the need to have further talks."

The advocates of coordination argue that the Brotherhood is no longer in a position to pose a serious threat. They believe that the illegal group has been weakened by security clampdowns, imprisonment sentences, the walkout by the would-be founders of the Wassat Party and their loss of control over professional syndicates. "The *Ikhwan* used to be very arrogant, but now they are willing to compromise," Abdel-Razeq said.

El-Said, however, stuck to his guns. "We refuse the idea of an Islamic party and we reject the concept of politicising religion. We view the Brotherhood as a backward force and the source of all the terrorist groups in action today," El-Said told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "The different opinions documented in the political report are an expression of the party's democracy, which reflects the views of all members. But we have more important matters to discuss in preparation for our congress."

School wars

A student has been remanded in custody for 15 days for allegedly leading an attack — that included Molotov cocktails — against a neighbouring school. **Gihan Shahine** investigates

A Cairo juvenile court has ordered a secondary school student to be remanded in custody for 15 days for allegedly showering a neighbouring school with Molotov cocktails in a fight that broke out over a girl. Following a police hunt, a second student, who allegedly plotted the attack, was arrested. Sixteen others were released by the court.

"That was a nightmare that I do not want to remember," said Abdel-Moneim Kamel, an educational official at Al-Azhar University and the father of Wael, 15, one of the 16 students who was released after spending four days in police custody.

Wael is enrolled at the state-run King Fahd Secondary School for Boys, located near the Abbas El-Aqqad co-ed secondary school in Nasr City.

According to witnesses and press reports, a group of King Fahd school students, aged between 15 and 17, gathered outside Abbas El-Aqqad School on 4 March and hurled Molotov cocktails into its courtyard. None of the students were hurt. A police investigation showed that the attackers sought to take revenge from the Abbas El-Aqqad students who had become embroiled in a fight with them a day earlier for harassing a co-ed.

"It was about 11am when we heard a blast in the courtyard," said a student at the Abbas El-Aqqad School. "At first, we thought it was a terrorist act and we stayed inside the building. But it turned out to be an attack by students from the neighbouring school."

Witnesses said that only three of the attackers were caught at the time of the assault. The others were rounded up by police in back streets, outside their school gate and in a neighbouring fast-food restaurant.

Education Minister Hussein Kamel Bahaeddin formed a committee to investigate the incident. He vowed that any school official proven to be negligent would be punished and any student proven guilty would be dismissed from school.

In a statement to the press, Bahaeddin maintained that acts of violence are rare in Egyptian schools when compared to schools in other countries. He said that combating school violence is the joint responsibility of families, educationalists, the media, intellectuals and psychologists.

The attack raised public concern about the increasing tendency of some students to resort to violence. "Violence is everywhere and we have to face it somehow," said Nader Fergani, an educational expert with UNICEF. Fergani said what is needed is a counselling service to provide parents with social and psychological guidance in the upbringing of children and specialised courts to deal with cases of school violence and delinquency.

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

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Ten years of UN modelling

MRS SUZANNE Mubarak returned to her Alma Mater — the American University in Cairo (AUC) — on 10 March to give the keynote speech at the opening ceremony of the Tenth Session of the Cairo International Model United Nations, **Fatemah Farag** attended

The occasion was a grand affair as celebrities headed by Mrs Suzanne Mubarak and including Cairo Governor Ibrahim Shehata and musician Ezzat Abou Ouf walked through the arabesque doors of AUC's main campus. AUC is celebrating the tenth anniversary of the Cairo International Model United Nations (CIMUN), an event which has grown to become not only the largest student activity on campus, but the largest inter-collegiate MUN programme outside of North America.

"The idea was initiated by students I took to a similar model UN in Europe. They came back and said we can do that," explained political science professor Tim Sullivan, who has been responsible for the programme since its inception.

During the event, which will run till 15 March, six United Nations Councils will be simulated: the Commission on Human Rights, the Commission on International Investment and Transnational Corporations, the Conference on Disarmament, the International Court of Justice, the United Nations Environment Programme and the Security Council. The latter has no set agenda but the others will be discussing topics ranging from the elimination of child labour to the security of non-nuclear weapon states.

On the morning of the inauguration, CIMUN headquarters were bustling with students getting name tags and finalising arrangements. "We started organising the event in October and have spent many hours going over details," explained Reem Sonbol, a political science senior responsible for CIMUN's public relations activities.

Between the delegates and the organisation committees, 450 students are participating in this year's simulation. One of the complications faced by the organisers was convincing foreign students to attend. "We usually have around 70, but this year the Luxor incident put a damper on attendance," explained Sonbol. However, students from national universities will be attending as usual.

Sullivan sums up the significance of the programme as follows: "This is an outreach programme giving students the opportunity to interact with their counterparts from other universities. Further, it is a learning experience outside of the classroom. There are some things you have to do, what I call practice transferable skills such as negotiation skills."

Although AUC students are usually stereotyped as apolitical, Sonbol points out that CIMUN is a good example that the opposite is true. "The problem with perceptions regarding AUCians is that they only look at us from the outside and they say we are flighty. However, we are very active and this event has drawn a lot of interest from the students. For example, for about 10 ushers we got 100 candidates."

Sullivan points out that there are many students at AUC who are interested in public issues but the problem is that they have very few outlets.

Not much will happen to the resolutions that emerge from the five-day discussion. But the event does catch the attention of local diplomats.

"There are many model UN's all over the world," Sullivan said. "Sometimes diplomats come to watch though."

Back at the main hall, students sat themselves excitedly, the lights dimmed and the proceedings began.

'Pushing the limits of the possible'

Mrs Suzanne Mubarak's address to the Model United Nations at the American University in Cairo

Dr Toepfer,
Excellencies,
AUC professors and students,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is always a pleasure for me to return to my Alma Mater and to meet my professors and students that have succeeded us. It is good to find that AUC continues to be in the vanguard in its innovative approaches to learning and its efforts to stimulate its students, as it did in my time, to educate themselves about the exciting world we live in, and to equip them with the basic understandings for coping with its complexities and problems.

It is obvious that, in today's world in which knowledge is an ever changing and renewable commodity, the traditional pedagogical methods that depend solely on what is already recorded are inadequate for providing the students with the perspectives and tools necessary to meet present and future challenges. I am not surprised to find that, with the revolutionary development in communication and information technology and the rapid movement towards globalisation, AUC started, ten years ago, to participate in an activity that prepares future generations for the global village we are inexorably becoming.

I am also not surprised that one of my professors, Dr Tim Sullivan, is the supervisor of this pioneering effort. Knowing the seriousness and quality he requires and knowing how hard he makes his students work, I have to extend to you all my sympathies. I must, at the same time, however, also extend to you my congratulations for having managed to meet those standards and to make a smashing success of the Model United Nations. We are very proud of all those who have kept the programme alive and healthy for a whole decade, a programme which, I hope, will continue to thrive for many more years to come. For with the ever changing world landscape, there will always be new issues of international concern that deserve study and debate.

From what I understand of how the MUN is operating, it not only provides the students with the opportunity to find out about the concerns that preoccupy the international community and about the policies and activities of the United Nations, it also helps them develop independent creative thinking, debating skills, and an appreciation of the necessary conditions for the promotion of international understanding, cooperation and peace. By running their own MUN programme — setting their own goals and agenda and organising themselves to meet these goals — the students, further, acquire experience in management and organisational skills and in methods of group participation and cooperation, which should prove to be valuable assets in the pursuit of any future career.

The United Nations: The importance of the United Nations that you have chosen to simulate is the universality of its membership, its role as a world forum and as a medium for international cooperation. Within the statement I received describing the MUN's programme, I found reference to tolerance, diplomacy and partnership. These are, in my opinion, among the key concepts that should define the true spirit of the United Nations. They are the guiding principles that should govern the conduct of international relations if the organisation is to continue to be a respected world forum for the establishment of international peace and understanding and a trusted channel for international cooperation.

Apart from conflict prevention and peace keeping, the United Nations is also expected to assist in the establishment of the conditions for peace. It does so by creating awareness of important issues that need to be addressed by the international community, establishing mechanisms for the exchange of experiences and expertise and mobilising financial and technical resources for the resolution of common problems and for development assistance.

Another important United Nations activity is the setting of standards and norms that form "a principled basis on which to assess and guide practice within the community of nations". The thing to remember in this connection, however, is that standards and norms of behaviour that are comprised in the numerous international declarations, conventions and agreements endorsed by member states, such as the Human Rights Declaration or the Convention on the Rights of the Child, have to be observed within individual countries.

This means that each nation, while respecting the spirit of the agreed upon principles and norms, has to work out its own implementation modalities. To be effective, these must give due consideration to the prevailing socio-economic conditions, cultural context and the priorities, sentiments and dignity of the targeted populations... a position we have emphatically stressed in the numerous international gatherings in which Egypt has participated. We have, I am happy to say, succeeded in creating awareness of the necessity of allowing nations to evolve their own appropriate strategies and programmes, within a realistic time frame, so that they may be able to achieve both immediate and long-term solutions to their problems.

One example I can give has to do with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Egypt actively participated in the preparatory work for the UN conference on the rights of the child, held in Alexandria in 1988, in recognition of Egypt's contributions to child welfare, and of its efforts to reconcile the proposed articles of the convention with basic Islamic tenets, paving the way for its ratification by Islamic states.

There is no question that we have benefited from the support and international experience of the United Nations and its agencies and bodies. But as in the case of the example I just mentioned we, too, have been able to influence their thinking and approach and have given them the necessary support to reach international consensus.

Social development: I strongly endorse your intent to focus in your 10th anniversary on "community projects and involvement with various UN agencies and to take part in the development of others' lives". This encourages me to talk about my own special interest — social development. I have personally worked closely at the national and international levels with many of the United Nations agencies concerned with social development — UNICEF, UNESCO, WHO, ILO, FAO, IFAD, among many others. We have collaborated on such programmes as integrated community development, improvement of women's status and conditions, and the promotion of children's education, health and welfare. This work is indeed a successful model of cooperation with the UN and its specialised agencies.

Egypt has been particularly active in relation to the formulation and endorsement of conventions concerning human rights and social development. Its positive position with regard to the respect and promotion of the principles, norms and standards of human rights is evident by the fact that, in addition to participating in the drafting process, it was among the first countries to endorse the UN Charter on Human Rights (namely: the Declaration on Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights), as well as to ratify 16 international treaties in this field.

Furthermore, Egyptian legislation has been modified to include the commitments called for in these conventions and treaties, the most recent of which was the 1996 unified law of the child. It is worth noting that there are a number of Egyptian experts in various UN committees dealing with human rights issues.

Child labour: You have chosen child labour as one of the issues on which you plan to concentrate this year. I would like to emphasise that serious social problems, such as child labour, do not occur *in vacuo* as independent phenomena. They are always part of the larger development picture and their true solution requires action on many fronts.

According to the Egyptian labour law, children under 14 should be in school and not in the labour market. We need to remember, however, that child labour, which is a serious problem confronting all developing countries is only a symptom of the more general socio-economic situation wherein poverty, population pressure and inadequate services prevail. To discourage the entry of children into the labour market is, therefore, not just a matter of enforcing labour laws forbidding their employment, it also means alleviating family poverty and facilitating the access of children to education — measures we all know that cannot be fully implemented overnight. Other measures are also needed to deal with the problem of children who are, today, out of school and who need to earn money to survive. We need to ensure that they are protected against exploitation, that their work conditions pose no hazard to their physical and mental health, and that they are given the opportunity to "learn as they earn". Wouldn't this approach offer a better and more realistic solution to the existing problem rather than leaving children who have missed school or have been nearly dropouts on the streets to become easy prey to drugs, violence and crime?

Before leaving the subject of child labour, I would like to sound a warning and draw your attention to the fact that such issues have been highly politicised, on the international level, and have been used to serve other than humanitarian proposes. I want to stress this point, of which I am very much aware, because it relates closely to my own work and experience. I know that we need to be vigilant. For the pressures that are exerted on developing nations to find instantaneous solutions to such age-old problems as child labour are, sometimes, motivated by political and economic self-interest, and not necessarily by a true desire to see a lasting solution to the problem.

MUN community involvement: I understand that the students participating in the Model United Nations programme have decided to break out of the sheltered walls of the university, and to make the benefits of this programme more tangible within their community. I salute you and commend you for the wisdom of your decision. As a start, you should try to acquaint yourselves with the map of Egypt's social development. I would be happy to extend whatever assistance you may need to facilitate your endeavour, and would be willing to act as your guide, as you seek to understand some of Egypt's problems and what is being done to overcome them... so that you may be able to define for yourselves the specific areas and manner in which you can help.

I am confident that we, in Egypt, are on the right track. As a first step in helping you educate yourselves about our social programmes and to whet your appetite for further knowledge, I shall describe briefly some of the efforts with which I have been closely associated — specifically those having to do with the education, health and welfare of children.

Children's programmes: Children are a country's future and their development and protection should, incontestably, be a top priority in any nation. As the most dependent and vulnerable segment of population, they need everybody's help. We the older generations, and you the younger ones, on whose energy and dedication we have to count for sustaining whatever momentum we have sparked, and for pushing the limits of the possible even further by setting and fulfilling more ambitious goals than we can dream of today for the benefit of our children and nation.

To protect, nurture and prepare our children, who represent over 35 per cent of Egypt's population, for tomorrow's world is not a simple task. It would require introducing basic improvements in the social economic and physical environment in which they are to grow. That is why children's programmes and services need to be undertaken within the general national development framework, perspectives and policies and necessitate the concerted efforts of the government, the private sector, as well as those of voluntary organisations of which, I am happy to say, Egypt boasts some 14,000.

Egypt can be proud of its record in the area of child care and development. The most important event that helped promote child development and from which all the children's strategies have emanated, was the decision of President Mubarak to declare the 1990's the Decade of the Child. It was a clear message to the national and international community, that Egypt has the political will to give special attention to the welfare of its children. It also explains why Egypt was one of the six pioneer countries to call for the World Summit on Children, and why it was able to participate effectively in its preparation and deliberations. The summit, held in New York in 1990, was attended by 72 heads of state who agreed to the setting of 27 development goals to be achieved before the end of the century. I was given the honour of addressing the summit as the representative of one of the six sponsoring countries.

Many commendable efforts are being made, particularly in relation to children's education and health, by both the government and non-governmental organisations. It is obvious that if we can keep children in school, at least through high school, we would not have any child labour problems, and we would ensure for them a better future.

Girls' education is being given special attention because of the tendency among poorer rural families to keep girls out of school, a practice that has resulted in a high rate of female illiteracy. Even though these young girls may not get in to the labour market, they tend to be married off at an early age, and to carry heavy work loads as family workers. For the sake of their own development and fulfillment, and to enhance their ability to serve the nation as workers and mothers of future generations, girls' education is an area of crucial importance for national progress, and one that is being given high priority in Egypt.

Two programmes are underway to allow children, particularly girls in poorer and remote areas, greater accessibility to education. These are the community schools established in collaboration with UNICEF and the one-classroom schools of the Ministry of Education... both of which are to be applauded for the positive results they have managed to obtain so far.

Continuing education through our Reading for All programme is an area in which we have made great strides. Today, we find children's libraries both inside and outside schools in every governorate. There was a dearth of children's books in Arabic when we first started. It was clear that, in order to incite the child to read, he or she has to find reading material that is informative, interesting as well as entertaining. We have, therefore, made serious efforts to stimulate the production and publication of such books. It is with great satisfaction that we find, today, a great variety of quality children's books on the market, some of which are originally written in Arabic while others are translations of foreign books. Furthermore, some of our children's books have, for the first time, gained international recognition.

The interest in providing children with the opportunity to read evolved with time into a desire to provide similar opportunities to young people and to the whole family. To that aim, a "Family Library Programme" was established based on the philosophy of providing the majority of Egyptian families, at symbolic prices, with the best selection of renowned books in all fields... history, literature, fine arts, science... etc. This achievement has been highly praised by intellectuals, critics and artists, and recognised as the most outstanding cultural initiative in modern Egypt.

The establishment of the Cairo, the Heliopolis and the Mubarak public libraries are also among our crowning achievements and we are working hard to establish a public library in every governorate. These libraries do not only provide books, they are centres of cultural radiation. They offer various training courses, and sponsor numerous intellectual and artistic activities — lectures, seminars, art exhibits which are attended by large numbers of participants.

You, who have always had access to good libraries, may not think that their establishment is such a big deal. I recall vividly the sorrow I felt when I observed that the majority of Egypt's children and young people, had neither a place nor appropriate materials to read. Today, I am truly proud of what we have been able to accomplish in a relatively short time.

Our whole "Reading for All" programme is a real success story. It has been hailed internationally as a model that should be emulated by other countries. UNESCO has established an "International Panel for Reading for All" to study the Egyptian experiment. The first meeting of the panel, which I had the honour to chair, was held in Aswan last November and was attended by Federico Mayor, the director-general of UNESCO. The panel recommended that governments and non-governmental organisations consider applying the experiences of the Egyptian programme, and that an international "Reading for All" promotion programme be set up which, following the Egyptian example, would be based on national initiatives and funding.

Computer literacy programme: As university students, you know the importance of computer literacy in today's world. The Ministry of Education has taken an important step in launching a programme for teaching school children to use computers, and to take advantage of the new communication and information technologies. It has instituted computer labs in 6,000 of its public schools, and plans to cover 5,500 additional schools by the end of this year. In this kind of programme, young people like you could lend a hand. I understand that you are already planning to teach some refugees how to use computers. This is a noble cause. But, how about adding children and youth to your list of trainees?

Now, I would like to mention landmarks in relation to our child development efforts.

Despite the services and programmes that Egypt was offering children and mothers, there was a need for an umbrella organisation to integrate and coordinate the activities of the various concerned agencies, to define the national policy, strategies and plans, and to follow-up programme implementation. The National Council for Childhood and Motherhood was established in 1988 to fulfil this role. It was due to the concerted effort of the members of the Council and particularly those of its Advisory Committee, that impressive results have been achieved. For the first time in the history of Egypt, the component of children and women was included in its five-year national development plan.

1999 is the last year of the Decade of the Child. This does not mean that it will mark the end of our concern over children's development. It only means that we should evaluate what has been accomplished during the decade, and set new targets as we move into the 21st century. As university students, you could involve yourselves in evaluation activities, for research is one of the best ways of understanding in depth the complex nature of development and the inter-related human, socio-economic and political factors that affect the success or failure of development plans and programmes.

New partnership for development: Finally, I would like to conclude my address by drawing your attention to the considerable global change, throughout the years, in slogans, concepts and priorities... Unfortunately, assistance budgets allocated by developed countries to UN agencies and programmes have lately seen significant cuts as a result of 'donor fatigue', and have shifted from long term development and poverty reduction at the very time when many developing countries are becoming more receptive to basic economic reforms... thus failing to accommodate the needs of the greater part of world population.

I would like to express the hope that the UN priorities for the coming years would be re-identified to meet the aspirations and needs of the developing world. This would mean that economic development issues, and the eradication of poverty should be at the forefront of its agenda, and that human resource development, technology transfer from north to south, and environmental protection be given high priority.

What is needed now is a new vision of development assistance within the framework of the UN, which can help recipient countries create an enabling and suitable environment for growth and development, and environment which can ensure that dividends from any progress would reach all segments of the society. That is why the application of new concepts such as "burden sharing" and "mutual assistance" is essential for building the new international partnership for development.

Thank you.







Clockwise from left: Mrs Mubarak addresses her Alma Mater; meets with guests before the ceremonies; follows the events of the evening withTim Sullivan to her left and Kenneth Toepte and Ms Shaden Khallaf, secretary-general of this year's MUN, to her right



Stock exchange looks forward to brighter future

A new restructuring plan announced last week makes the future of the stock exchange seem brighter, reports **Sherine Abdel-Razek**

In one of his rare meetings with media representatives, Sherif Raafat, head of the stock exchange, has disclosed a comprehensive plan that will upgrade the market's performance. In a press conference at the headquarters of the Capital Market Authority, Raafat said the plan will cover a wide range of measures, from renovating the exchange's El-Sherifeen Street premises to maximising the efficiency of the trading systems while improving the performance of its cadres through training programmes.

Raafat said that the exchange is currently faring well, its index having risen by 21.3 per cent through 1997 despite the plunge in Southeast Asia that has shaken all emerging markets. The exchange's capital also increased to LE70 billion. However, Raafat said that the exchange is still burdened by a number of problems. In addition to tackling these issues, the new plan aims at turning Egypt's stock exchange into a world class market.

Upgrading the efficiency of market transactions is the core of the plan presented by Raafat, and introducing a new coding system is one of the ways to achieve the goal. The system gives numbers to the accounts of brokerages working in the market. This will eliminate transactions that are executed under fake names. Some brokers execute orders for their own companies under fake names such as Sophia Loren and Clinton. The Capital Market Law prohibits brokerages from making deals.

According to the new plan, which aims at solving problems related to financial intermediaries, only qualified brokers will be able to acquire membership in the stock exchange. Members will have to sign a membership contract which includes a number of binding rules regulating their work.

Trading sessions and how they can be managed successfully were important parts of Rafaat's new plan. He said that odd orders — orders for buying less than 50 shares — are a problem that undermines the automatic trading system in the market. Execution of odd orders, accounting for 66.6 per cent of the trade volume, consumes the same time, cost and effort as that of buying bigger shares. This will now be changed. Odd orders for shares of the same company will be collected together in lots of 50 shares and executed together as one order at their average price.

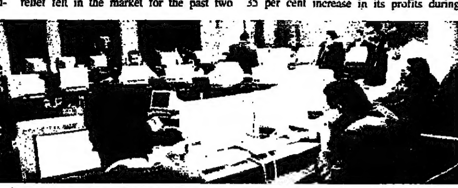
Moreover, a new index will be introduced in the market within the next few weeks. To be called Cairo 90, the index will include the most active 90 companies traded in the market. These companies alone corner 90 per cent of overall market transactions. Under the plan, they will all be included in the Central Depository System (CDS). So far, only 36 of these companies are included in the CDS.

The exchange has also signed a contract with a company formed by Egyptian banks to unify the payment system. About 66 per cent of market transactions are currently paid for in cash, resulting in inconveniences for foreign investment funds which are accustomed to the Delivery Versus Payment system, currently applied in less than 40 per cent of the transactions.

According to Raafat, this will not be the only contract that the exchange authorities will finalise in the coming period. It is also considering striking a deal with Dow Jones Telerate that will set up a financial information network in companies throughout Egypt. Moreover, negotiations are under way with news agencies, including Reuters, to publish reports and news analysis on market transactions.

The new plan was only one reason for the relief felt in the market for the past two weeks. The boom that transactions witnessed the week before was another reason. The Capital Market Index recorded its highest gain in the last four months, gaining 11.55 points to close at 370.85 points during the week ending 5 March. The volume of transactions also increased to LE455 million. Analysts believe that the unprecedented success of the Egyptian Mobile Phone Company offering, more than 50 times oversubscribed, was the major reason for the boom. At the time of the offering, which closed two weeks ago, investors rushed to liquidate their holdings to acquire shares in EMPC.

The resulting decline in share prices was very tempting to investors. The milling sector was among the front-line gainers with all its eight milling companies registering increases. The banking sector fared well as well, with a number of the biggest banks announcing increases in their 1997 profits. Misr International Bank (MIB) announced a 35 per cent increase in its profits during 1997 to reach LE189.9 million. Alexandria Commercial Maritime Bank made a 43 per cent increase in its profits, posting net profits of LE50.5 million.



New plans aim at gearing up the stock exchange into a world class market *photo: Ayman Ibrahim*

Egypt Gas was the market's biggest star. It alone cornered 28.75 per cent of the overall market turnover. A total of LE130.8 million of its shares changed hands during the week.

Islamic International for Real Estate Investments had the highest increase in share value, 27 per cent, to close at LE24.49. On the other hand, Egyptian Expatriates for Investment and Development suffered the highest loss, 14.03 per cent, to close at LE26.6. Overall market gain was reflected in the large number of companies, 90, making gains, compared to 22 that lost ground.

Where to put your money

A how-to conference last week gave tips on how to invest in the market and how companies can attract would-be investors. **Niveen Wahish** reports

Last week's conference, "the successful investor in the capital market," asserted that liquidity and transparency are crucial for luring investors.

One of the participants at the conference, organised by Excellence Consultancy, was Albert Momedijan, head of the Middle East and North Africa Desk at Hong Kong Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC). "A lot of steps have been taken to improve liquidity, transparency and disclosure on the market," Momedijan said. However, he added that what had been achieved was not enough. Momedijan advised that the information disclosed be made simpler to enable investors to analyse it. He also called upon companies to make public any significant event, whether positive or negative, on the company's performance.

Defining the Egyptian investor, Shamel El-Hamawi, professor of finance at Ain Shams University, said that like most investors in emerging markets, investors in Egypt are speculators who seek to realise the greatest profit in the shortest period.

Advising investors on how best to do that, Mounir Hendy, professor of finance and financial institutions at the University of Tanta, said the investor must first look at the general position of the company, such as projected profits, expected demand on the products of the company and the future of the industry to see whether it will be affected, for example, by liberalisation. He also advised investors to study general economic indicators such as the rate of interest, which affects the profits of any company since borrowed money is a major source of finance for industries.

Having completed this basic analysis, Hendy said that the investor must then make a technical analysis. This depends on a review of past share prices in the hope of finding a pattern for the shares' movement which will assist in making the correct investment decision. "It is based on the theory that history repeats itself," Hendy said. "It is a historic study of the movement of shares in the past," he added.

Hendy said that investors should study the market index thoroughly and make sure that the shares of the company in question are actively traded. This is to ensure investor liquidity. "If demand on the shares of the company is not strong, it might mean that if the investor wants to sell his shares, he might not find a buyer." Hendy added that "the low number of operations reflects the weak possibility of liquidity."

Hendy also advised investors to buy when prices are low and not to wait endlessly before selling.

Hendy recommended that investors do not place all their eggs in one basket. "Make a portfolio of shares and spread out the risk," he said.

Not only did the conference address investors, but it also attempted to advise representatives of companies on how to attract investors to buy their shares. Hendy said transparency is needed in order to avoid rumours about a company's performance. "Company management should be frank about their performance. Investors respect frankness. If a company's poor performance is justified, they will not abandon it," he said.

He also called for consistency in the announcements made by officials to avoid creating confusion. "We also need the government to inform us, not only about the industries the economy needs, but which sectors will be affected by GATT (the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade), to enable investors to put their money in the right place."

World standard indicators

MINISTER of Economy Youssef Boutros Ghali has said that Egypt's economy is moving steadily towards international standards. In a press release, Ghali attributed this "to the consistent macroeconomics policy-mix and the open market strategy of Egypt's economic reform programme."

Egypt's latest indicators show unprecedented improvement as reflected in low inflation and market stability. Consumer price inflation for January 1998 has dropped to less than 3.8 per cent.

"This brings the average annual inflation rate since the beginning of the 1997/98 fiscal year to less than four per cent, compared to around 10 per cent for the same period two years ago," Ghali said. He added that an open market and increasing competition were now benefiting the consumer. "We do not depend on any pricing policies; we leave market forces to drive our economy," Ghali said. He was referring to the moderate increase in the food and beverages commodity group prices which increased by 4.7 per cent during the past year.

Ghali stressed the government's long-term commitment to maintain macroeconomic stability and further improve the investment environment to attract foreign and domestic investments.

"Our growth strategy depends on encouraging small enterprises along with attracting large and multinational investments. Small and medium enterprises stand at nearly 99.7 per cent of total private non-agricultural entities, while generating around 74 per cent of Egypt's employment opportunities," he said.

During the current fiscal year, Egypt is aiming for a limited budget deficit in the 0.9 per cent range of GDP or slightly less. Credit expansion will remain under tight control and the government is keen to maintain a prudent financial and banking sector.

FTA with Tunisia

NINE bilateral agreements were signed in Cairo last week between Egypt and Tunisia. The accords, signed by Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri and his Tunisian counterpart, capped the sixth session of the Egyptian-Tunisian Supreme Joint Committee.

At the meeting the prime ministers discussed the possibilities of promoting economic relations between both countries and called for boosting the volume of bilateral trade to $300 million by the year 2000, compared to $72 million in 1997. Egypt exported $47 million worth of goods to Tunisia compared to $25 million worth of Tunisian exports to Egypt.

The most important aspect in the agreements was the establishment of a free trade area (FTA) between Egypt and Tunisia which both countries hope will be the first step towards an Arab FTA. One agreement includes mutual tariff exemptions for 100 goods, and a 20 per cent tariff reduction on other goods. El-Ganzouri said that tariffs on both countries' exports will be gradually reduced until the year 2000 when they will be scrapped altogether.

Other agreements on education and investment were also signed.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**

Feasible economics

Christopher Lane examines the key elements of Egypt's economic reform programme, contributing to renewed growth and stability

Egypt's recent economic stabilisation efforts represent a remarkable success story. The determined application of appropriate macroeconomic policies, in the context of IMF-supported programmes during the 1990s, led to reduced inflation, improved public finances, a more stable currency and a strengthened banking system, as well as a stronger balance of payments position.

Financial markets have for some time recognised the improved strength and stability of the Egyptian economy, as evidenced by significant inflows of portfolio and direct investment. Egypt's stabilisation strategy has as one of its main pillars the rapid reduction of the fiscal deficit. Egypt achieved an up-front fiscal adjustment in 1991-92 through a substantial revenue effort coupled with significant expenditure restructuring and reduction. The country recorded further progress in deficit reduction each year from 1991-92 through 1996/97. On the revenue side, the main increases drew from an adjustment of the exchange rate — which boosted Suez Canal revenues and oil company profits — and the introduction of a general sales tax. On the expenditure side, the authorities made deep cuts in the extensive capital investment budget, reduced debt servicing following Paris Club agreements and significantly reduced non-targeted subsidies. Other expenditures, including wages, were relatively protected.

Early in the stabilisation programme, the authorities implemented major reforms in the financial sector to strengthen the banking system and initiated steps to introduce monetary instruments to control liquidity.

In early 1991 Egypt effectively unified its foreign exchange markets and concurrently lifted official limits on interest rates and introduced auctions for sale of treasury bills. During 1992 and 1993 it also lifted direct credit controls to private and public sectors.

Starting in 1991, Egypt maintained its exchange rate at a stable rate to the US dollar. It followed an active sterilisation policy to dampen the expansionary impact of capital inflows using treasury bill sales with the proceeds deposited at the Central Bank of Egypt. The rapid accumulation of foreign exchange reserves early in the stabilisation period enhanced the credibility of the exchange rate peg and, in turn, led to a reduction of inflation expectations.

To counteract the short-term effects of lower consumer subsidies during the adjustment programme, Egypt created the Social Fund for Development which helped alleviate poverty through labour-intensive public works, gave support to micro-enterprises and basic community services and improved the monitoring of living standards.

During the early 1990s, the pace of structural reforms lagged behind the stabilisation programme and, by 1994, the privatisation programme had stalled and other planned reforms had been postponed. More recently, however, there has been a re-invigoration of structural reforms, most evident in the economic programme that Egypt has had in place since early 1996 with the support of an IMF Stand-by Arrangement. The authorities have made considerable progress in privatisation, deregulating protected sectors, reducing distortions from pricing and subsidy policies and removing other obstacles to trade and investment. Private investment has responded positively to liberalisation and is increasingly serving as the engine of growth for the economy.

The privatisation programme has been a notable achievement, particularly since early 1996. More than one-third of the state industrial portfolio has been divested and divestiture proceeds have ranked high in comparison with other transforming economies. Privatisation has focused on the divestiture of majority stakes of non-financial public enterprises (excluding state utilities and infrastructure operations) and the reduction of state assets will need to be added to the sale portfolio. The Egyptian authorities have indicated that in the future the privatisation programme will include the sale of a minority stake in the state telecommunications authority as well as stakes in ports and hotels.

Egypt has traditionally had a strong "banking habit" with high levels of financial intermediation, notwithstanding extensive state controls in the sector. Financial sector reform initially focused on developing indirect instruments of liquidity management and enhancing the attractiveness of domestic currency banking assets through interest and credit liberalisation, while also recapitalising the main public sector banks. The second phase of financial sector reform aimed to increase the competitiveness of financial markets by divesting state ownership of joint venture banks, while also strengthening bank supervision and adhering to international banking standards. In large part, these reforms have underpinned an expansion of financial assets intermediation, particularly in the equity markets, and have contributed to a strengthening of banking profitability and bank soundness.

Nonetheless, the task of delivering sustained growth of output and employment in Egypt is incomplete. Investment and domestic saving rates remain below the levels needed to accelerate further growth over the medium term. And despite relatively competitive labour costs, labour-intensive production remains well below potential, while merchandise exports are limited and narrowly focused.

The key to unlocking Egypt's growth potential is continued reforms to improve investment and saving, notably through completing the process of privatisation, modernising the financial sector — especially through the divestiture of commercial banks and insurance companies — and removing bureaucratic hurdles to private sector development. In addition, further efforts to liberalise the external trade regime will enhance competitiveness.

On 11 October 1996, the IMF's Executive Board approved a 24-month stand-by credit for Egypt for SDR27.4 million (about $390 million at the time). In view of the country's strong reserve position, the government has not drawn, and does not intend to draw, on the credit. The arrangement has helped intensify efforts to meet the chief medium-term challenge facing the country, namely the need to increase economic growth to create employment opportunities and raise living standards for Egypt's rapidly growing population.

The two-year economic programme has consolidated the macroeconomics stabilisation gains achieved under previous IMF support, and is broadening and intensifying structural reforms through greater privatisation, deregulation, trade liberalisation, and fiscal and financial sector reform. Between 1996 and 1998, the programme aims to achieve annual real GDP growth of about five percent, a further decrease in inflation to about five per cent, and maintenance of a viable exchange position. The increased growth rate is expected to create 400,000 new jobs annually. An expected 2.5 percentage point rise in investment and saving relative to GDP and a budget deficit of under one per cent of GDP are expected to underpin this stronger macroeconomics performance.

A fundamental goal of the programme is to transform the ownership structure of the Egyptian economy, where the public sector still figures prominently in manufacturing and investment and represents about one-third of total employment. Other key structural reforms include further trade liberalisation, deeper fiscal revenue reforms (including the transformation of general sales tax into a value-added tax) and rationalisation of the income tax, civil service reform, accelerated financial sector reform, further strengthening of banking supervision, and administrative reforms to simplify and rationalise investment regulation.

Under the programme, Egypt is pursuing measures to ensure that critical social needs are also addressed. The programme provides an increased number of qualified nurses and teachers to strengthen publicly provided health and education services, a stronger social safety net and greater targeting of assistance to ensure that the most vulnerable segments of the population are protected. The country's Social Fund for Development is drawing increased support from foreign donors, with emphasis on providing retraining and related assistance for displaced workers.

The writer is Egypt's desk officer at the International Monetary Fund's Middle Eastern Department.

Beirut disdains Netanyahu's 'old wine'

It has become a pattern — every time Israel suffers casualties in south Lebanon the Israeli government proposes negotiating with Lebanon for the withdrawal of its troops from the area. **Zeina Khodr** reports from Beirut

Israel launched a high-profile diplomatic campaign promoting a conditional offer to withdraw from southern Lebanon in exchange for security guarantees from the Beirut government. But Lebanon, along with Syria and the Arab League, rebuffed the proposal which also was dubbed unrealistic by Israeli opposition politicians and army officers.

The proposal also suffered a major setback when it was rejected by France and Russia.

A day after three Israeli soldiers were killed in Israel's self-declared "security zone" last week, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu said his government had given up trying to make peace with Lebanon and Syria for the time being and was aiming instead to negotiate terms for a pullback from the south.

The so-called coordinator of Israeli activities in Lebanon, Uri Lubrani, said the proposal amounted to a new policy by Israel toward Lebanon. "The government is now giving up on peace negotiations at this stage and is limiting the focus on implementing UN Resolution 425, which talks solely about security arrangements," Lubrani said. "Israel's position no longer links a withdrawal to a full peace agreement with Lebanon or Syria, but only to security guarantees by Beirut."

But Lebanon said Resolution 425 — adopted in 1978 — calls for Israel's unconditional withdrawal. Beirut sticks to the resolution's call for Israel to "immediately cease military action against the territorial integrity of Lebanon and to withdraw forthwith from all Lebanese territory".

"Dwelling on the subject of security guarantees as proposed by Israel is jumping into the abyss," Lebanon's Foreign Minister Fares Boueiz was quoted as saying.

Beirut ruled out negotiating with Israel over 425, asserting that Israel "does not have the right to interpret the resolution to suit its own purposes," Boueiz added.

"There is no need for any talks as any security arrangements would involve giving Israel free concessions. Acceptance by Lebanon to sit down and negotiate on 425 would show Lebanon is ready to compromise on 425 and open the way for its amendment, something we reject," Boueiz said.

Resolution 425 is clear and the mechanism for its implementation is enshrined in Resolution 426. "The resolution does not require security guarantees between Lebanon and Israel but between Israel and the UN on the one hand and the UN and Lebanon on the other. Israel should inform the UN of the date and parameters of its withdrawal and the UN, in turn, will inform Lebanon that Israel is withdrawing so Lebanon can take the necessary steps for the deployment of its forces," noted the Lebanese foreign minister.

Israel's offer is being interpreted in Beirut as a manoeuvre to corner Lebanon over its refusal to negotiate the terms of the resolution while giving Israel the role of peacemaker.

"If it is a unilateral pullback, we will all welcome it," Hanan Ashrawi, Palestinian higher education minister, who was in Beirut to attend a UNESCO-organised conference on higher education, said. "If it is not, Netanyahu may be using it to respond to internal public pressure, improve his image abroad... He will argue his government is trying to advance the peace process, and he is eager to deflect attention from the Palestinian issue on which critics accuse him of flouting UN resolutions and ignoring commitments in interim peace deals."

Several Israeli politicians and army chiefs have also expressed doubts over the move, claiming Syria would never agree to a conditional withdrawal as it could weaken its hand in future negotiations over the Golan Heights. "The chances Syria would accept this are nearly zero," said Ehud Barak, the head of Israel's opposition Labour Party. Israeli army chief-of-staff General Amnon Shahak was quoted as questioning whether the initiative could go anywhere given opposition from Syria.

Lebanon and Syria have a united stance in peace negotiations and both have refused to strike a separate peace deal with Israel.

Syrian Foreign Minister Farouq Al-Sharaa made a high-profile official trip to Beirut last week that aimed at bolstering Lebanon's stand in the face of Israel's latest manoeuvres and emphasising the unity of the two countries on peace talks.

Syria put the blame squarely on Israel for the deadlock in peace talks. "The Madrid conference has been undermined ever since Netanyahu took office. He is running away from commitments, looking for excuses to undermine the chances of peace... and he is interested in dividing the Arabs and bringing tension to the area," Al-Sharaa told reporters after talks in Beirut. "Israel must withdraw without conditions."

The Arab League condemned Israel's offer saying it was designed to deflect Israeli public concerns over the rising military casualties in the zone. "They are trying to give Israeli public opinion the impression they want to pull out of the south," said Mohamed Zakariya Ismail, the League's assistant secretary of state for political affairs.

The offer is likely never to see the light of day, especially after Russia and France also expressed their opposition. Netanyahu and his Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai tried unsuccessfully to sell the proposal in Europe. Mordechai tried to enlist French support while in Paris this week, but French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine only offered his country's assistance once an accord is reached.

Russia's Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov was quoted as saying that any Israeli pullback with or without security guarantees would fail unless it was part of a joint Lebanese-Syrian plan. "Any attempt to separate the Lebanese and Syrian tracks would be a disaster," Primakov said.

The Israeli offer was denounced by all Lebanese groups. "Israel invaded our territory without permission... so it should leave without any conditions," Hizbullah's Deputy Secretary General Sheikh Naem Qassem said. Successful Hizbullah operations are the main cause of Israeli casualties in southern Lebanon.

The conditional offer is not new and the Lebanese government says it is nothing but a trial balloon. The Beirut government remains adamant that it will not bow to pressure and will not accept anything less than an unconditional Israeli pullback.

Arafat's lament

Departing from his usually optimistic tone, Yasser Arafat warned the international community that the Middle East peace process was "dying and may already be dead," reports **Khaled Amayreh** from Jerusalem

"I won't be revealing any secrets if I say that the peace process is undergoing a very dangerous situation and that, in fact, it is dying." Palestinian President Yasser Arafat was speaking on Saturday to deputies at the opening of the third parliamentary session of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) in Gaza.

Arafat blamed the Israeli government of Binyamin Netanyahu for indulging in "a deliberate and systematic effort aimed at corroding the peace process" which, he said, had reached "a moribund state of total paralysis and virtual death."

"The Israeli government is willing to see the peace process become part of the past," Arafat said, adding that "nothing is moving, nothing is progressing. On the contrary, everything is going backwards."

In what seemed to be a defensive posture in the face of widespread popular disillusionment with the Oslo Accords, Arafat argued that the fault did not lie with the agreements but with Israeli refusal to abide by their terms.

"The essence of the DOP [Declaration of Principles signed between Israel and the Palestinians] was mutual recognition of the rights of the two peoples in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 and 338 as a prelude to a final settlement," said Arafat.

He added, however, that the Netanyahu government lacked the political will and the inclination to move forward on the road to peace.

"From the very inception, this government [of Netanyahu] adopted policies and positions aimed at corroding the peace process which eventually brought it to a deadlock. They used all kinds of provocation and stalling tactics to undermine peace efforts as manifested in their adamant refusal to carry out the second redeployment from occupied Palestinian land in conformity with the Hebron agreement," Arafat said.

Arafat accused the Israeli government of seeking to "change the terms of reference of the peace process for the purpose of perpetuating their occupation of our homeland and imposing a fait accompli on our people."

The Palestinian leader also pointed out that Israel was continuing to torment the Palestinian people in every conceivable manner.

"They are demolishing our homes, seizing our land, expanding their illegal settlements on our lands, especially in and around Jerusalem, where they are trying frantically to cut off the holy city from the rest of the West Bank and obliterate its Arab and Islamic identity."

Arafat pointed out that Israel was strangling the Palestinian economy by preventing thousands of Palestinian workers from reaching their jobs in Israel.

"They are trying to choke our livelihood by denying us the freedom to move and trade, internally and externally."

Arafat also touched on the recent showdown between Iraq and the United States, saying it constituted a stark example of international "double standards and hypocrisy."

"Why doesn't the international community move to implement international legitimacy and UN resolutions on Palestine?" asked the Palestinian leader.

On Monday, Arafat met with Jordan's Crown Prince Hassan in Ramallah. Hassan also paid a visit to Tel Aviv on Tuesday in an attempt to revive the stalled peace process.

Following brief talks with Arafat, the Jordanian crown prince said Jordan will demand "full and precise implementation of the agreements between Israel and the Palestinians," adding that "we expect a large-scale redeployment from the West Bank."

Earlier, Ariel Sharon, the Israeli minister of national infrastructure, visited Amman and met with Jordan's King Hussein and Prince Hassan.

It is not clear what prompted Hassan to go to Ramallah and then to Tel Aviv at a time when the Israeli premier continues to reject American and European proposals for a redeployment of the Israeli army from at least 15 per cent of the West Bank.

However, observers say that the visit was routine in nature and that it was unlikely that Sharon carried to Amman any good news for the Jordanians to convey to the Palestinian leadership.

Observers noted that Hassan's visit could have been to urge the Palestinian leadership not to give in to despair and to stick to the process "no matter what," a position that, if adopted by Arafat, would prove untenable at most Palestinian levels.



A Palestinian woman hugs her son who is holding a picture of his father jailed in Israel, during a protest held at the International Red Cross offices in Gaza on Monday. Some 100 women and their children demonstrated as they demanded the release of all Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails *(photo: AFP)*

Government shake-up rattles Sudan

The Sudanese cabinet underwent a major reshuffle on Sunday. **Gamal Nkrumah** asks whether the new cabinet is meant to appease the banned opposition

Sudanese President General Omar Hassan Al-Bashir fired 12 ministers from his 37-member cabinet on Sunday and formed a new government — a move which observers see as a bid to broaden his regime so that it includes some southern Sudanese and northern opposition figures.

Ministers in key positions such as defence and interior were changed, but those two posts remained in the hands of the hard-line National Islamic Front (NIF) led by Sudanese Parliament Speaker Hassan Al-Turabi. The current shake-up comes in the wake of the mysterious plane crash that killed Vice-President Lieutenant General Al-Zubeir Mohamed Saleh last month.

A majority of opposition leaders downplayed the significance of the changes.

"The reshuffle does not signify any real change in government policy — it is merely cosmetic," said Farouk Abu Eissa, the secretary-general of the Cairo-based Arab Lawyers Federation and official spokesman of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) — an umbrella group of northern and southern Sudanese opposition groups.

Abu Eissa's sentiments were echoed by the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), the leading southern political group fighting for autonomy for southern Sudan and the secularisation of the country.

"The government reshuffle does not impress us," SPLA spokesman John Luk told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

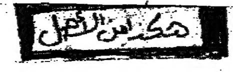
More southerners now occupy key ministerial positions than ever before under the Bashir regime. Soon after the Nasir plane crash, several southern Sudanese politicians who had signed a peace accord with Khartoum last April threatened to rejoin the SPLA if they were not given cabinet posts. Five southern Sudanese politicians were appointed in the cabinet reshuffle. Ethnic Shilluk leader Lam Akol, formerly a close associate of SPLA leader John Garang, was made minister of transport and communications. Joseph Maalwal became minister of animal resources. Maalwal, an ethnic Rumbek-Dinka, has long been associated with Akol. Colonel Galwak Garang Deng, another Dinka, is the new minister of survey and construction development — a newly created ministry. Kabashour Kuku was made minister of education. The new cabinet, like the old one, has only one woman — Agnes Lukudu, formerly the governor of Equatoria Province in southern Sudan, who was named minister of labour.

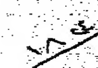
But perhaps the biggest surprise was the appointment of two banned opposition Umma Party members, Mahdi Babou Nimer as health minister and Sherif Tuhami as irrigation and water supply minister. However, Umma Party leader Sadig Al-Mahdi said in Cairo that he rejected the half-hearted attempts by the Sudanese government to "espouse reconciliatory policies whose aim is to give a semblance of democratisation."

Indeed, the ruling NIF, headed by Sudan's spiritual leader Al-Turabi, controls all key ministerial positions and has tightened its grip on power. Former Information Minister Al-Tayib Ibrahim Mohamed Kheir, who barely survived the Nasir plane crash, was made minister of social planning — a key position that includes the religious affairs, youth and sport, women and social affairs portfolios. Hardline Islamist militant Ghazi Salaheddin was declared the new minister of culture and information. A new key portfolio for International Cooperation and Investment was given to the former governor of the Bank of Sudan, Abdallah Hassan Ahmed — yet another NIF hard-liner.

There are fears that some of newly appointed ministers are extremist anti-southern chauvinists. The newly appointed Minister of Defence General Ibrahim Suleiman, a former chief-of-staff, was dismissed from office a couple of years ago because of irresponsible racist remarks he made about southerners in public. His reinstatement has angered many southerners.

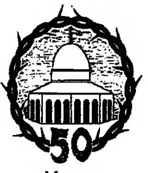
Edited by **Khaled Dawoud**





Guerrilla warfare

March marked a turning point in the Arab-Israeli struggle. As Arab resistance intensified, the State Department backtracked and behind their back Truman pledged US support for an Israeli state. Kamel El-Sherif witnessed events on the ground as he fought with the contingent of Muslim Brothers who had infiltrated Palestine the previous month. His book remains an exceptional source of insight into the guerrilla struggle in Palestine as it was lived by the guerrillas themselves

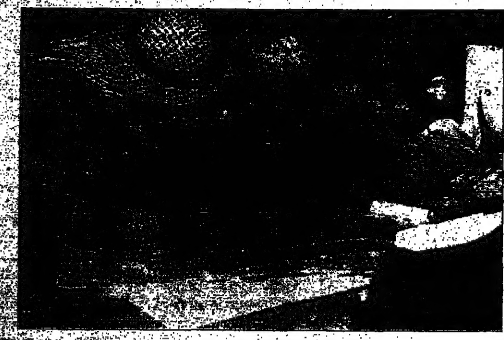


Battles between Arab guerrilla forces and the Haganah, aided by the Zionist gangs, intensified during the month of March. Five Arab villages around Jaffa, Tibyris and Safd were attacked and razed to the ground, while a bomb, which killed 11 and left 27 others seriously injured, was planted in the Arab quarter in Haifa on 3 March. Fawzi Al-Qawuqji, leader of the Arab volunteer guerrillas, entered Palestine on 7 March, and during the month Arab resistance noticeably intensified.

Of that month, the Palestinian historian Walid Al-Khalidi writes: "The most remarkable phenomenon during the month of March was the intensification of the combined efforts of the Arab volunteers [led by Al-Qawuqji] and the Palestinian Mujahdeen of the "Sacred Jehad", the military arm of the Arab Supreme Committee [headed by the Grand Mufti Amin Al-Husseini], despite poor coordination between the two groups, and the limited arms and numbers of the latter."

Together, the Palestinian and Arab guerrillas controlled virtually all the roads linking the different Jewish colonies, managed to infiltrate the defences around the headquarters of the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem and blew the building up on 11 March, as well as staging 3 successful ambushes on travelling Haganah units, killing 126 soldiers and injuring and capturing many more. Walid Kalidi writes: "Had it not been for the intervention of the British army in those battles, the losses incured by the Haganah would have been far greater, and scores of Jewish soldiers taken as hostages would not have been released."

The intensification of the fighting during the month persuaded some circles in the American State Department that the partition plan was unworkable. On 19 March the US delegate at the UN Security Council, Warren Austin, asked the Council to suspend action on partition and to convene a special session of the General Assembly to work on a trusteeship and truce. Michael Cohen considered the tristeeship proposal "the biggest defeat Zionist diplomacy had encomtered since the White Paper of 1939." The Arabs were jubilant with the turn of events. What they did not know was that only a day before Warren Austin had made the proposal, the US president himself, Truman, had met Chaim Weizmann in secret and given him a "specific commitment" that he would back the establishment of a Jewish State that would include the Negev.







Clockwise: Blast in the Jewish quarter in Jerusalem; Ahmed Abdel-Aziz (middle), leader of the Egyptian guerrillas in Palestine, flanked by Abdel-Qadir Al-Husseini, leader of the Palestinian guerrillas and Kamal El-Din Hussein, later member of the RCC of the Egyptian Free Officers; Mustafa Sadek, Commander of the Egyptian army in Palestine; and Fawzi Al-Qawuqji, leader of the Arab Liberation Army at the Hotel Continental in Cairo, Feb. 1947

Reasons of defeat



By Kamel El-Sherif

"Some have the mistaken belief that guerrilla warfare, or war carried out by irregulars, is tantamount to anarchy. The experience of the Muslim Brothers in Palestine may shed some light on how complimentary guerrilla warfare is to war by regular armies. It must be remembered, however, that guerrilla warfare cannot be carried out except by men who firmly believe in the justice of the cause they are fighting for. To ensure optimum results, these men must be highly trained and in possession of a high degree of intelligence, as they will confront in the course of their fighting various difficult situations.

"As the main task of guerrillas is fighting the enemy in a land occupied by the troops of that enemy, they have to be capable of spreading terror in the ranks of the enemy's forces by carrying out fleeting attacks on roads used by the enemy in order to cut them off, and whenever possible destroying the enemy's arms and equipment.

"The aims of any guerrilla warfare can be summed up as follows:

"- First, inflicting heavy loses on the enemy without engaging in direct combat;

"- Second, forcing the enemies troops to disperse, and exhausting the enemy in chasing and fighting the guerrillas;

"- Third, forcing the enemy to keep constant guard over its installations and transportation routes, thus maintaining the enemy in a constant state of anxiety;

"- Lastly, inciting all national elements against the enemy, preventing any cooperation with its troops and mobilising those elements in gathering information on the enemy's movements and locations.

"We can now go on to examine whether the Muslim Brothers succeeded in their guerrilla war in Palestine.

"Many wars would not have been decided save for the help of guerrillas... During the Second World War, when many of the European armies were smashed under the blows of the Nazis, many leaders of the liberation movements in the occupied countries resorted to guerrilla warfare to disrupt the German occupying forces and thus lead the Germans to abandon many of the regions they had occupied, so as to retain only certain strategic centres. The guerrillas were one of the direct reasons behind the defeat of the Nazis when Europe itself was turned into a battlefield. They were the best allies of the allied armies who later went in to liberate Europe.

"Jews in Palestine have resorted to guerrilla warfare tactics, forming their forces in order to attack the centres where Arab armies were stationed, thus dealing a blow to those armies without engaging in direct combat. When the Arab armies stopped the war in accordance with the truce imposed by the Security Council, the Jews were organised in regular divisions, as well as in irregular gangs. The regular army would engage in battles with the aim of acquiring land, while the terrorist gangs provided help to the regular troops. Thus the gangs were able to continue fighting when the army was not, and the excuse the Jews could always give was that the gangs were irregular forces and that the state of Israel had no control over them.

"Similarly, the Arab armies in Palestine were in great need of close cooperation with irregular forces. And there is no doubt that the Palestinians themselves should have been the main source to draw upon for these irregular forces. However, seeds of doubt and distrust, the work of the enemy, were planted between the Arab armies and the Palestinians and the result was catastrophic.

"In conclusion I'd like to discuss an opinion that is widely held: that the entry of the Arab armies into Palestine was the beginning of the catastrophe that led to the loss of Palestine, and that there was no need in Palestine for any troops other than the guerrillas who could have worked freely without adhering to any decisions by the Security Council or the UN.

"This opinion came to be widely held after the defeat of the Arab armies, which was partly caused by adhering to the Security Council-imposed cease-fire, especially the first four-week truce (imposed on 11 June), during which the Jews were able to obtain arms and equipment which they did not have before that date.

"My answer to this argument is that guerrillas can never decide the result of a war on their own. They remain an important and effective weapon if they coordinate with an organised army and if they themselves are well trained. While the regular army occupy cities and strategic centres and maintain these positions, trained guerrillas can carry out attacks on the enemy's backlines, cutting transportation routes, and spreading fear and anarchy among the troops of the enemy.

"The entry of the regular Arab armies to achieve the aim we were struggling for was inevitable; the mistake lies somewhere else.

"Firstly and foremost those armies were not well trained or adequately equipped to carry out the mission they were supposed to fulfil. They were totally ignorant of the enemy they were fighting. Another mistake was made by the Arab political leaders, who miscalculated the influence of the international organisations over them and how vulnerable they were vis-à-vis those organisations, for in fact they were totally dependent on them.

"There is no doubt about the necessity of regular armies in a battle such as ours; they were a necessity in the past, and they are for the future — that is, if we really want to liberate the Holy Land."

Translated from *The Muslim Brothers in the Palestine War*, 1953, Cairo. pp 87-91

Brothers in arms

The Muslim Brotherhood in the Palestine War, Kamel Ismail El-Sherif, second edition1953, Cairo, pp.265

This book was written in 1949, immediately after the first Arab-Israeli war was over. In it Kamel El-Sherif, who fought in the ranks of the volunteers sent by the Society of the Muslim Brothers, narrates the experience of these men, mixing facts with often opinionated details.

The work itself is dedicated to the memory of "the martyred Imam Hassan El-Banna", the Brotherhood's founder and leader, who was assassinated in Cairo in February 1949. The preface to the 1953 second edition points out that the first edition of the book was confiscated, and that had it not been for the 1952 Revolution in Egypt, the work would not have made it into the bookshops. This is not surprising, since El-Sherif attributes the "defeat" in Palestine to the existence at that time of corrupt regimes throughout the Arab world, among them the pre-1952 Egyptian monarchy which had recently been overthrown. The leaders of the nascent republic were no other than the Egyptian officers who had been besieged by the Jewish forces in Falouga.

This book presents a moving account of how both the Brotherhood and men like future President Gamal Abdel-Nasser struggled to hold off their assailants in 1948.

As is obvious from the title, this 265-page narrative views the 1947-48 period in Palestine from the perspective of those Muslim Brotherhood members who fought on the front line. In doing so, it places the entire war in a religious perspective. The Arabs here are generally referred to as "the Muslims" who were defeated by their opponents "the Jews", and what the Brotherhood was engaged in was "*Jihad*" — a holy war.

But beyond the bitter tone apparent in the blame laid at the door of the Arab regimes, *The Muslim Brothers in the Palestine War* also offers a rare detailed account of the battles by an insider who led the Egyptian irregulars on the southern front. Indeed, this sense of bitterness even gives the reader a passionate sense of reliving the experience of these men. "What did the Arab governments do to combat that growing danger? Every Jewish act of aggression, every daring step towards expanding and laying down the foundations of the Jewish state, was met, from our side, by nothing but a protestation to the UN," the author writes. Throughout he makes no secret of his anger at the incompetence of the Arabs in dealing with the Zionist threat.

The first three chapters of the book cover the historical background to the Palestine question since the Ottoman period and describe the "various attempts" by the Jews to purchase Palestinian land. They also discuss the role of the British mandate in establishing a "national home" for the Jews. According to El-Sherif, the British "deceived" and "anaesthetised" the Arabs by "underplaying" the importance of establishing this national home. The mandate, for example, he says, appointed a Jewish-dominated or anti-Arab administration in Palestine. It also opened the door to immigration, ultimately raising the number of Jews in the land from 50,000 in 1916 to half a million in 1940.

The book is not devoid of sympathy for the "wretched and miserable Jews who had tasted the bitterness of deprivation in the Nazi camps." El-Sherif points out, however, that oddly enough, it was not the victims — the survivors — who poured into Palestine following the Holocaust. Rather, those who came were "strong, powerful men who were brought in for political reasons."

The "story" of the Society of Muslim Brothers in Palestine begins in November 1947, following the UN partition resolution. At that time, the Jews were already well-prepared for war, as they had been arming themselves "in silence" for a long time, helped by the fact that the areas they had colonised were effectively off bounds to Arabs. "It was known that the Jews had several military organisations in Palestine as well as in some East European countries, amounting to more than 80,000 soldiers in all, who had been trained in guerrilla warfare to combat Arab attacks." El-Sherif cites the example of the Haganah; "which had been in formation since the Ottoman rule in Palestine, and which grew under the auspices of the British from being a mere night watchman into a comprehensive, properly-equipped and well-trained army." The Palestinians, on the other hand, although they had been in a state of war with Zionism and Britain ever since the Balfour declaration in 1917, had proved unable to organise themselves in any equivalent way. This was in great part due to the fact that while world Jewry supported their "brothers" in Palestine by providing them with arms, weapons, ammunition and military equipment, the Arab Palestinian people were left to fight against the Jewish occupation alone. "That is why, when the fighting started, the two opposing forces were strictly incommensurable," El-Sherif states.

The Brotherhood did not move into Palestine simply as a reaction to the UN partition resolution. "The Brotherhood, as an international Islamic institution, has always placed the defence of the Islamic cause at the top of its agenda... and Palestine was their top priority." The Society of Muslim Brothers was active in Palestine well before 1947, El-Sherif claims. They sent the Palestinians all the weapons and money they could, and during the 1936 Revolution many members of the Society succeeded in infiltrating the country and joining forces with the Palestinians, especially in the North, where they worked with "the great Arab Mujahed, Sheikh Ezzedein El-Qassam".

After World War II, the Brotherhood began to put themselves more systematically at the service of the Palestinian cause. They sent delegations of preachers and young men to urge the Arabs to fight alongside the Palestinians and to set up secret youth training camps. This development angered the Jews who, in return, launched a counter-campaign by publishing lengthy articles in the European and American press attacking the Brotherhood and exposing the threat they posed to British and American interests. Whether this claim is accurate or not, an interesting translation of a *Sunday Mirror* article from 1948 provides a rare document of Jewish lobbying from this period. The article, attributed to one Roth Karif, attacks the Brotherhood at some length. It ends with the words: "If the world does not recognise the threat posed [by the Brotherhood], Europe may well witness again what it first witnessed a decade ago, as it may find itself confronted by an Islamic Fascist empire extending from North Africa to Pakistan, and from Turkey to the Indian Ocean."

It was not easy for the Brotherhood to get into Palestine, El-Sherif says. He recounts how he attempted to enter the country in November 1947, "but found great difficulty... I was forced to turn back more than once, so that I had to proceed on foot, for long distances. I thus advanced cautiously till I reached Jaffa." There he met up with other Brothers, but was soon arrested by British officers. When detained by the Jewish gangs, "members of the Brotherhood were treated as war criminals and not like prisoners of war... They were killed and their bodies mutilated. I saw with my own eyes how the Jews seized and threw the martyr Mokhtar Mansour into an armoured vehicle. I was told later by eye witnesses that the Jews had simply shot to kill... they had recognised him by his beard and identity card and they simply killed him."

The British, according to El-Sherif, actively collaborated with the Jewish gangs. Kamel recounts how he saw a large number of British officers training young men and women of the Haganah near Jerusalem. "The British continued to steer the war policy from behind the scenes... the Brotherhood asked the Noqrashi government to allow them to send a league of mujahedeen to be stationed in the Northern part of Al-Naqab desert, but they were turned down." The Brotherhood then decided to make another appeal, under cover of 'a scientific expedition' to Sinai. This time they received official approval and "secretly smuggled themselves into Palestine in February 1948." Fighting soon broke out between the Brotherhood and the Jews in Al-Naqab.

Throughout the book Kamel frequently recounts tales of the Brotherhood's chivalry. Similarly, he stresses how their efforts were repeatedly thwarted by the inefficiency and disorganisation of the Arab army, and overpowered by the British and US-backed Jewish gangs.

Thus the book explains how the first truce declared on 11 June 1948, which was accepted by the Arab states, only helped the Jewish gangs occupy more land and claim more weapons. "Most of the dangerous zones that the Jews had been unable to occupy before, became easy targets during the truce. The same old justification used by the UN and the Israeli government was that the perpetrators of these acts were nothing more than unorganised extremist gangs. The Arab countries accepted this claim, and proudly refused to engage in guerrilla warfare."

Although it does not offer any particularly original information about 1948, *The Muslim Brotherhood in the Palestine War* stands out as one of the very few works to record the events of this period in such detail. It is rich in personal impressions and intimate observation of such key figures of the war as Ahmed Abdel-Aziz, the leader of the Egyptian guerrillas, General Al-Mawawi and General Mustapha Sadek, commanders of the Egyptian army in Palestine, as well as of many of the Arab leaders of the resistance movement such as Abdel-Qader El-Husseini and Fawzi Al-Qawuqji.

Reviewed by ***Amira Howeidy***

We welcome letters and contributions on all subjects raised on this page. Material may be edited for length and clarity; it should be addressed to M. Anis, Al-Ahram Weekly, Galaa St., Cairo; Fax: +202 578 6089; E-mail: weekly@ahram.org.eg

India's political pot pourri

India's mess gets messier, writes **Eqbal Ahmad**

Indian Muslims demonstrate in support of the Congress Party *(photo:Reuters)*

The world's most awesome democratic exercise is over. Some 333 million people — 55 per cent of registered voters — cast their votes in India's 12th general election.

With five different governments in the past two years, the primary concern of voters was stability, a quest which greatly improved the appeal of the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Yet, the electorate's final verdict has made the political mess even messier. The last parliament was a melée of 29 political groups; this one will contain no less than 38. The chance of further instability is about as certain as the arrival of the monsoons in a few months.

With 249 seats in the Lok Sabha (lower house), including those won by its nine coalition partners, the BJP leads with the redoubtable Atal Behari Vajpayee as its candidate for prime minister. The right-wing coalition is 24 seats short of the simple majority of 273 needed to *form a government. It can reach that goal by luring in*dependents, small regional formations and defectors from other parties. If BJP succeeds in buying new allies, it will lead an unstable coalition which must rely on the mercies of the ambitious and the greedy.

Its adversaries are determined to keep the BJP out of office. They too are trying, although somewhat half-heartedly, to cobble together a governing coalition made up largely of the Congress and the United Front. If such a coalition does materialise, the Congress — which holds 166 seats — will dominate it. Its likely partner, the United Front, has taken 98 seats — of which some 55 are held by the Communist Party of India - Marxist (CPIM). Together, the Congress and United Front own a total of 264 parliament seats; any number of the independently elected members and regional groupings may join them to form another unstable government. There are about a dozen more constituencies whose voting results are still to be declared, but they are unlikely to upset the balance between the two contenders to power.

Since both lack the required numbers to form a government, both are bidding for independents and defectors. What wags call the "Delhi bazaar" is now wide open, and trading is brisk. The BJP has an edge. Its coalition partners predate the polling; they contested the elections under a common banner, and are less susceptible to changing sides. *The Congress-led coalition, on the other hand*, will form after the elections. Its potential allies, among them small regional groups, will align with the highest bidder in terms of money, patronage, or positions in government. With generous support of the business class, the BJP has more money and fewer inhibitions about making a deal. Also, the Congress leaders seem divided over whether or not to seek power now while the BJP is eager to do so.

Timing is a crucial factor. Whoever is asked first to form the government will have a better chance to do so. The 'floating' parliamentarians tend to swim toward the first ship that beckons. As head of state, the president of the republic does the asking, but only after the election commissioner has submitted his report — which is scheduled for 12 March. The president is obliged to invite the party that commands the clear parliamentary majority to form the government. Since no one does, President K.R. Narayanan has a certain discretion. So all eyes are on him. Given the edge BJP enjoys and also the precedents of 1994 and 1989, it is expected that around 13 March President Narayanan will invite the BJP to form the government.

In India, this prospect is a cause for anxiety among liberals and minorities — especially the Muslims. After all, BJP and many of its allies have built their public support by mobilising anti-Muslim sentiments and deploying revivalist Hindu slogans and symbols — a tactic that catapulted *BJP* into prominence and power. In 1984, the party had entered parliament with only two members. Ten years later, it passed Congress as the largest party in parliament. That decade was marked by its campaign to demolish the Babri, a 16th-century mosque built by Babar, *the first Moghul king. BJP and its allies claimed that the* mosque was built over the site of the birth place of Lord Rama, a revered Hindu deity, and pledged to replace it with a temple. India's most respected historians refuted this claim. But BJP and its allies, like right-wing formations the world over, invent — not heed — history.

Their protracted campaign to destroy the Babri, and 3,000 other mosques, was a marvel of political mobilisation based on hate and demagoguery. "Were this movement to succeed", wrote Sarvepalli Gopal who is Nehru's biographer and among the most eminent of India's historians, "secularism would be strangled and India would be heading for a Fascist take-over."

In December 1992, a frenzied mob in the thousands, led by BJP leaders including L.K. Advani and Vajpayee, destroyed the mosque while the forces of the state looked on. Advani is expected to become minister of interior, which is tantamount to having the fox guard the chicken coop.

During this electoral season many Indian and foreign commentators have described the BJP as having evolved toward moderation. *Their* assertions are reassuring, but sadly lack evidence. It is true that the BJP made cautious attempts at wooing Muslim votes this year. Yet, nothing in its manifesto or the electoral rhetoric of its leaders suggests a change from a sectarian to secular, mono-cultural *to multi-cultural, and aggressive to peaceable outlook.* Its electoral commitments include increasing India's nuclear capability, abolition of Article 370 which constitutionally guarantees a certain autonomy to troubled Kashmir (an area which Pakistan and India have disputed for 50 years), and a uniform civil code which many minority and tribal groups oppose. Since it will command but a bare majority in the parliament, BJP may not be able to fulfil its agenda. But then surrender to political exigency ought not to be equated with a change in disposition.

Vajpayee, the prospective prime minister, is described by optimistic commentators as epitomising the BJP's moderate metamorphosis. I have met him and discussed matters with him *at some length. He is indeed* an impressive man — unassuming, with a Pakistani graciousness to a fault, a patient listener, intelligently curious, and very shrewd. He puts one at ease and conveys an air of thoughtfulness and moderation. During a flight from London to New York — he was then India's foreign minister — he walked barefoot into the economy class insisting I join him in the first-*class cabin. For the next six hours,* he asked questions and listened without showing any sign of fatigue.

I never met General Mohammed Zia ul-Haq but as Vajpayee queried me about the disposition, outlook and style of the late Pakistani president, I was struck by the similarity between the two men. There was, however, one fundamental contrast: the shrewd general's right-wing Islamism was a product of *his ambition* while Vajpayee's *ambition* has been an outcome of his ideology. Much in his career suggests a man with a capacity to grow in political skill and intellectual sophistication, but nothing in it indicates a turning away from the hard right-wing Hindu ideological *commitment* he made as a young man in 1940-1941.

It was then that he became a swayamsevak of the militant fascist youth organisation, the RSS. From there, he graduated rapidly into the main party Jana Sangh — the forerunner to the BJP. His rise within the movement was rapid and his experience varied: as an organiser (*vistarak*) in Uttar Pradesh province, as editor of party magazines *Rashtra Dharma* and *Panchjanya*, as secretary to Jana *Sangh's firebrand leader Shyama Parasad* Mookerjee, as a chief organiser (*paracharak*) of the party, as a member of its powerful working committee, as a parliament member, and as the man who brought the reincarnated party (now BJP) into coalition with the moderate Janata Dal, serving *as minister* of external affairs. A seasoned, professional politician, Vajpayee can be many things to many people but, as he assured his followers in a 1991 article, he fundamentally remains what he has always been — a radical, dedicated to building a strong, culturally uniform, politically centralised, militarily powerful Hindu Rashtra (motherland).

The BJP's opponents would be wise to let it form the government and govern for a reasonable period. *This time* around it is likely to take office with its power greatly circumscribed. It does not even have the economic wherewithal to arm India with nuclear weapons and missiles. The parameters of BJP's policies will be defined by what *its leaders have begun to describe euphemistically as the* "minimum national consensus". Being temperamentally radical and ideologically self-righteous, they will try to push the boundaries of this "consensus" by means both fair and foul. But in doing so they shall encounter resistance at home and abroad. In office, the BJP may prove more ineffectual than the ill-fated government of I.K. Gujral.

Assumption of office by the BJP now may be the only way to arrest its rising strength. *It is better for India* and its neighbours for it to contest the next national election as an incumbent. Incumbency rarely favours a party in the Third World, and the BJP appears particularly vulnerable to this trend. In this election it performed poorly in Ma*harashtra, Rajasthan, and Himachal Pardesh — states* where it had previously controlled the provincial government. Better a weak BJP government now than a strong one later.

Serbs slaughter Kosovo's Muslims

Serbian chauvinism is again being directed against a Muslim Balkan people. **Safa Haeri** warns of ominous repercussions

There is, yet again, no common European Union (EU) approach to the latest crisis in Federal Yugoslavia's province of Kosovo. Each concerned nation — particularly Germany, Italy, France and Britain — is playing its own tune, and all are looking to the United States to come up with a solution.

The seeds of this latest bloody crisis were sown in 1989 when, after the collapse of the former Yugoslavia, the hardline Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic abruptly put an end to the autonomy of Kosovo province, where *ethnic Muslim Albanians outnumber the Orthodox* Christian Serbs by nine to one, by placing it under the direct control of Belgrade. As a result, the militant Albanian nationalist Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) was born, and in 1992 the KLA unilaterally proclaimed the "Republic of Kosovo" under the leadership of Ibrahim Rugova. The new Balkan political entity has still to be internationally recognised.

Since then, the Albanians have organised their own "parallel government" and *institutions in this province* which the Serbs consider to be the "cradle of the Serb nation". Albanian children go to Albanian schools, Albanians are treated in Albanian hospitals which operate, like the schools and colleges, in underground garages and parking lots. "They shop in Albanian shops and go to Albanian bars and cafés. The segregation is almost total," observed one French journalist, accusing the Serbs of imposing a segregated or "apartheid" system in Kosovo with the aim of ethnic cleansing — "the same as they did before in Bosnia".

Tensions flared up two weeks ago when the Serbian army launched a brutal "retaliatory" action aimed at capturing KLA militants who had earlier ambushed Serbian *police patrols in the village of Likosane, killing* and wounding four of them. These punitive operations continued for a whole week, spreading to the Drenica region (Central Kosovo) where hundreds of houses belonging to Albanians were destroyed and more than 60 people, most of them Albanians, killed.

Kosovo's self-proclaimed President Ibrahim Rugova, who is also the leader of the Kosovo Democratic League (KDL), demanded that the province be "urgently placed under international protection".

"The Serbs shoot first from afar, then they burn houses, then they attack villages and then they go after the civilian population, forcing them to abandon their homes. This is the *same* policy of *ethnic* cleansing we have seen before in Bosnia," Rugova warned.

"*It is not* hard to predict what will happen down there in Kosovo. It will be the same kind of slaughterhouse that Bosnia was," concurred Bosnian President Aija Ezzatbegovic.

The international community has urged Belgrade to stop its military operations and *start negotiations* with representatives of the Albanian community. Deploring "deeply" Serbian military intervention, both the *EU* and the *US* have suggested possible trade sanctions if Belgrade continues the policy of "violence".

But backed by Russia, its traditional ally, Belgrade has rejected the call. Following a meeting with the Turkish *Foreign Minister Isma'il Cem, the Serb au*thorities declared they were "resolutely opposed" to any attempt at "internationalising" an issue they described as an "internal conflict". "The Kosovo problem can be resolved only in Serbia, within the framework of its Constitution *and laws," said Pres*ident Milosevic in an open challenge to Western efforts to find a peaceful solution to the conflict.

Warning Western capitals against "direct interference" in Yugoslavia, Moscow rebuffed "inadmissible statements from some Western countries raising the possibility of a direct interference from outside as well as their threats of all kinds of sanctions against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro)."

In response, British Foreign *Secretary Robin* Cook, current president of the EU's Ministerial Committee, said, "Serious violations of human rights, of civil liberties and the freedom of political expression are matters of concern to every member of the international *community*."

Despite their tough language, neither Europe nor the US want to intervene militarily in Kosovo. They have, however, agreed to impose strong punitive measures against Belgrade, including the possible freezing of all Yugoslav assets *held in foreign* banks and institutions, if the Yugoslavs do not put an end to their military actions against the Muslim Albanians.

Reign of the invisible masters

As the nations of the world gather in Paris to prepare their final abdication of all responsibility for their citizens' welfare, **Faiza Rady** peers into the document with which they hope to ring in the 1000-year reign of transnational capital

In this era of encroaching globalisation, *George Orwell's nightmarish* vision of a mysteriously invisible, yet totalitarian and all-pervasive power structure controlling every minute aspect of people's daily lives is being insidiously realised. Following the Orwellian scenario, this power structure — a shadowy kind of government — has seemingly lost all the physical and material appendages *of the agencies of power*, while retaining a large and repressive police force that functions to enforce a law and order decreed elsewhere, by anonymous rulers operating in some nebulous and sinister twilight zone.

As in Orwell's world, conventional governments — whose function is to provide social *services to their citizens* and *offer protective* barriers to national industries — seem to be on the wane in the face of an emerging body of global trade treaties which bypass and transcend local legislation, ultimately abrogating any semblance of social contract and national sovereignty. Paving the way to this new world order is the Multilateral Agreement on Investments (MAI), that is currently being negotiated in Paris within the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) between the world's 29 richest countries.

Although negotiations have been ongoing since *1995* and 90 per cent of the treaty's provisions have already been agreed upon and codified in a 170-page document, the MAI is still surrounded by a shroud of secrecy and its existence is painstakingly camouflaged.

During a debate about the treaty's potential threat to democratic institutions in the *French National Assembly* last December, Jack Lang, president of the Foreign Affairs Commission, emphatically denied having any knowledge of the MAI, reported *Le Monde Diplomatique*. "We don't know what is being negotiated and in whose name," declared Lang.

US government officials likewise claimed there was no MAI draft document until a coalition of international NGOs headed by Public Citizen Global Trade Watch — a group headed by prominent American consumer activist Ralph Nader — managed to "*liberate*" a copy *of the* text and circulate it on the Internet. Largely ignored by the international media, the MAI negotiations have received extensive coverage only in a few journals that have been willing to risk their necks and take up the campaign for open information and citizen action, amongst them the French monthly *Le Monde Diplomatique*.

Responding to the media's almost complete blackout of the issue, the debate has taken off in cyberspace with various web sites denouncing the apparent gagging of the so-called free press: "Corporate empowerment stonewalled with media silence", and "MAI: Trade agreement *from hell" headlined The Winds, a dedicated* MAI web site, trailed by related links to articles condemning the people's "right to know nothing" and declaring that "the real political issues are the issues the corporate media refuses to cover".

Despite the Internet's remove from real reality, cyberspace activism managed to mobilise sufficient grassroots support to organise a mass rally against the MAI in Washington DC on 12 February. Public Citizen also managed to rally congressional opposition to the treaty, especially since the Clinton administration has kept Congress in the dark about ongoing negotiations. "The nearly-completed MAI treaty has been negotiated in tight secrecy without authority from or consultation with the US Congress," explained Lori Wallach, director of Public Citizen.

As a result of the controversy, a US congressional hearing on the MAI took place last Thursday where Wallach exposed the treaty's agenda. "The goal of the MAI is to expand the same extreme multinational corporate agenda of undermining countries' sovereignty and disempowering even legitimate government action which is found in the GATT-WTO," *said Wallach. The United States Council for Inter*national Business (USCIB), which has a membership of 300 multinational corporations, and its global counterpart, the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), are crucial behind-the-scenes players in the OECD's hushed-up negotiations in Paris.

At stake is the free and unrestrained movement of foreign investment capital across national borders and the global protection of profits — real or potential — at the expense of national sovereignty and decision-making. Nicknamed "The Corporate Bill of Rights", the *MAI* provides investors with vested powers over and above standing national and international legislation. "What makes the MAI so remarkable is not just its very broad definition of investment but also its unique process to protect the rights of investors," explains Canadian lawyer Barry Appellation on the *Appellation and Associates* web site, adding that "the MAI's 'investor-state' dispute settlement process provides for a fast and effective means of settling disputes between investors and governments by bypassing domestic courts completely."

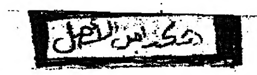
Essentially aimed at protecting the profits of foreign investors in de*veloping countries, the investor-state dispute* mechanism *is* designed to settle investment disputes between foreign corporations and governments. As a result, foreign investors would not be held accountable under local legislation and could effectively challenge the statutes of binding international treaties and conventions for undermining their profits — real or potential — under one of the MAI's most dangerous clauses relative to "expropriation" and "compensation". "The MAI language obligates governments to compensate for action having 'the equivalent effect' of even an 'indirect expropriation'. What does that mean? '[Perceived] lost opportunity' to profit from a planned investment would be a type of loss sufficient to give an investor standing... according to the text," explained Wallach at Thursday's congressional hearing. Consequently, the pretext of potential or real profit losses may be used by foreign investors *to contest* any and all government policies regulating labour legislation, the environment, affirmative action, subsidies — and even public health and education services.

Examples of multinational investors challenging domestic legislation have already been seen under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), although NAFTA provides investors with considerably less potential leeway for their expropriation and compensation claims than the MAI. *Le Monde Diplomatique* cited the case of the US-based Ethyl Corporation which sued the Canadian government for $251 million in expropriation claims after the Canadian government banned the use of the gasoline additive and neurotoxin MMT last April. MMT, which is manufactured only by Ethyl, is believed to damage car anti-pollutant systems — yet Ethyl Corporation has filed an expropriation suit against the Canadian government, *claiming that they* regarded even the Canadian parliament's debate about the MMT ban as a de facto expropriation of their corporate assets. The ruling in the case is still pending, *but if* Ethyl wins the day it will be a case, as Wallach says, of "paying the polluter, a cruel twist on the principle of the 'polluter pays'".

Beyond bypassing local legislation and ultimately disempowering national governments, neo-liberal trade treaties like NAFTA and their more extreme *versions like the MAI*, disrupt social contracts and destroy the political legacy of particular countries, especially in the South. When Mexico joined NAFTA, the Mexican government was forced to scrap the land reform clause of its national constitution guaranteeing tenure on communal farms to native peasants — in order to ensure free and *unprovisional* land access to Canadian and US investors. "Four years of NAFTA have resulted in massive dislocation of peasant farmers as agribusiness companies have accumulated large plantations," wrote Wallach. "Since NAFTA went into effect, real wages in Mexico have dropped 27 per cent and more than two million workers in agriculture and small businesses have lost their jobs. Since the MAI is in many ways a more expansive and global form of NAFTA, the effects on the Third World could be comparable," commented *The Winds*.

The MAI's requirement that foreign capital be provided with unimpeded access to natural resources may in the end transform the conventional political landscape by eliminating the very concept of the nation state. In the final analysis, "the intention of the MAI is not to regulate investments but to regulate governments," according to the Joint NGO Statement issued by 600 international organisations protesting the MAI text. If the MAI scenario is realised and governments agree to allow transnational capital free and unfettered access to and control over global resources, they will ultimately lose what remains of their sovereignty, and their function will have been reduced to policing and securing the profits of their invisible masters.

Edited by **Gamal Nkrumah**



What they don't tell you

The Iraq crisis topped the headlines, week after week, writes Eric Rouleau. But the barrage of information buried one essential question: who makes the news?

managing the Iraqi file as it self to the fact that the Secur- shed its control in a matter r have relinquished its hold? the oil embargo once UN in- hat Iraq no longer possesses l of atomic, chemical and bi-

Samuel Berger, one of the ign policy, responds in the negative. Vashington Post, President Clinton's y indicated that Washington still re- aq when it deems such a strike nec- e approval of the international com- l the conviction that UNSCOM, the aded by Richard Butler, is the only our of the Baghdad regime, and as- t changed its mind as to the imple- ncil Resolution 687.

that the elimination of Iraq's weap- ing of the oil embargo, as stipulated solution. Contrary to the opinion of pers of the Security Council, Wash- dad must first show its "peaceful in- ; all the UN resolutions — of which re the sanctions are lifted. In other be maintained indefinitely, at least dam Hussein, which Berger himself reseeable future.

er, it seems, was replying to France esident Jacques Chirac, Prime Min- Minister of Foreign Affairs Hubert er that it was necessary to envisage the embargo, but also Iraq's re- tional community — under the con- disarmament process be complete. e irritated the US leadership further JN-guided diplomatic resolution of ed that a multipolar order would en- he current unipolar world could.

te thus put his finger on the main 'S policy over the past few weeks. as Washington was concerned, was q or squeeze Saddam Hussein, but overeign right to intervene militari- greement of the international com- t perceives, rightly or wrongly, as a s". This absolute right was defined lbright in 1994, when she declared: terally whenever we can, and uni- nust." Beyond Iraq, this doctrine an, Syria, Cuba, North Korea, and State Department might care to in- xt day, on the list of "rogue states"

is whether the US backed down be- greement only in order to get a run- s undoubtedly premature to answer Clinton will only take a decision in onsidered several international, re- ch will depend on the evolution of the pressure exerted by the hetero- r lobby", as well as the epilogue of als threatening the man at the White Washington will have the means of eld (for instance, if UNSCOM in- oning the good faith of the Iraqi au- llising US public opinion in favour

he enemy, the campaign of dis- on waged by states at war or mobil- : instruments to which democracies commonly resort. The US is no ex- cellent experts in psychological war-fare, as the Western press learned to its great chagrin before, during and after "Desert Storm" in 1991. Dozens of articles and books published in the US in the aftermath of the war, denouncing the media's manipulation, unfortunately proved unable to cast doubt on Washington's recent allegations as to the arsenal of non-conventional weapons Iraq supposedly possesses.

A careful reading of the deluge of "information" pumped out by the US and British authorities, and taken up in chorus by most of the media, reveals first and foremost that most official information — and leakages — seem to emanate from one source: US intelligence. American satellites and U2 spy planes, after all, are flying over Iraqi territory and informing UN inspectors, the vast majority of whom are British or American; it is the CIA, well grounded in northern Iraq and omnipresent in the neighbouring countries, that feeds the secret service apparatuses of the Western countries, which have few means of verifying the "facts" they are offered. Unless one believes in the infallibility of US intelligence, and in the US's perfect impartiality in the Middle East conflicts, one can only wonder how reliable the information handed out can be, when its sole purpose was obviously to justify the urgency of a military strike.

It is true that the psychological warfare campaign was sufficiently subtle to dispel suspicions. It is indeed difficult to question the honesty of "information" when it is attributed, not to American intelligence, but to "well-informed" or "Western" anonymous sources, when it is carefully presented as a plausible hypothesis, not as a certainty; when no peremptory statements of fact are made; when pure speculation is disguised as credible accusations; and even when it takes the form of an unassailable truth. It is especially difficult, of course, if one has no way of verifying this information through independent sources.

So we are reminded that Iraq has the technical means of manufacturing chemical and biological weapons, which is perfectly true; then we are told that hundreds of tons of products which could "eventually" serve in the manufacture of such weapons have "disappeared", instead of being used in the pharmaceutical or agricultural industries, as Baghdad "alleged". In this argument, as in others, clearly, Saddam Hussein's word does not count for much against Bill Clinton's.

The *Washington Post*, again, reports, without citing its source, that Moscow concluded a contract with Baghdad in 1995. According to its terms, Russia was to provide ingredients with which Iraq could manufacture hundreds of bacteriological incubators; the American paper added that it was unknown whether or not these ingredients had been delivered. Moscow and Baghdad strenuously denied the very existence of such a contract, but Albright expressed her anxiety and proposed, very innocently, that an investigation be opened. Nothing is proven; but the seeds of suspicion have been sown.

Additional "information", equally impossible to check, filters through to the media. For example, a "confidential" document from US military intelligence indicated that Iraq had managed to build "several dozen" Al-Hussein missiles (with a range of 600km) and several Al-Abbas missiles (with a range of 800km), which could reach Israel, Turkey, and the Gulf states. No one deemed it necessary to ask where, when and how these weapons could be produced in such large quantities in a country which has been under the closest surveillance for seven years. This alarming information, for that matter, made no ripples in the countries concerned — with good reason: the American report affirmed that Saddam Hussein would not use these missiles in the foreseeable future — even in the case of war — in order not to reveal prematurely the arsenal of prohibited weapons he was constructing in the greatest secrecy. In other words, it would take a long time, not to say forever, to verify whether this information is baseless or not.



Still on 10 February, the head of a US Congress task commission on terrorism and non-conventional weapons, Yossef Bodansky, presented a report in which he asserted that, according to several intelligence services (British, German and Israeli but, strangely enough, not American), Iraq had secretly sent around 400 missiles to Sudan and Yemen after the invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, and had set up centres for the production of weapons of mass destruction in Libya and Sudan. Despite the absurdity of this "information", reproduced by the media with no comment, the US defence secretary, William Cohen, and the head of UNSCOM, Richard Butler, both declared that an investigation into the matter should be opened.

A few days later, *Le Monde*, exceptionally quoting American intelligence, reported that Iraq had converted four French-made Mirage FI fighters into "chemical and biological bombers". The *London Times* published the same information the next day, citing *Le Monde*, still without reminding its readers that the existence of weapons of mass destruction has yet to be confirmed by UNSCOM. Then again, how is it possible to know whether these planes, bought from France fifteen years ago, and lacking spare parts because of the seven-year embargo, are still operational?

The Pentagon — probably to add to the credibility of this and other similar reports — revealed officially for the first time the means at its disposal to spy on Iraq: notably, twelve satellites, each of which accomplishes a different task. One, for instance, is programmed to listen in on all government communications, another to photograph an object 15cm long from a distance of 300km. If this is the case, it would only be legitimate to wonder as to the function of this armada of satellites, hundreds of cameras, electronic centres and heat detectors installed by UN inspectors to observe Iraqi territory night and day — not to mention the hundreds of surprise visits carried out by Richard Butler's team over seven years. Several governments have complained about Butler, who saw fit to affirm, without the least proof, that Baghdad could destroy a city like Tel Aviv. Yet no one seemed surprised at a White House press conference when British Prime Minister Tony Blair declared, following a long meeting with President Clinton, that Iraq had in its possession non-conventional weapons which could destroy the population of the entire planet — no more, no less.

Unfortunately for those seeking to justify beforehand the "surgical strike" which was about to be administered to Iraq, a good part of world public opinion, especially the Arabs and the Europeans, did not take the terrifying threat described by the British and US media very seriously. This allowed diplomats of various nationalities — Russians, French, Egyptians, especially — to open the way to Kofi Annan's mission and to the Baghdad accord.

This does not mean, however, that the danger has disappeared. The US will not allow an obstacle, or even a major setback, to get in the way of its perceived role as sole global superpower. It has already let it be known that UNSCOM inspections will continue indefinitely, and it has the means of keeping its word. The fact remains, however, that evolutions on the global scene, especially in the Middle East and in the Balkans, could dissuade the US from implementing a policy that has already done America itself considerable harm.

Translated from French by
Pascale Ghazaleh

The politics of procedure

Hassan Nafaa examines the implications of the recent Lockerbie ruling — and suggests that the International Court of Justice has struck at the very foundations of the current international order

ernational Court of Justice which will arbitrate in the one hand, and the US and the explosion of an Amer- Lockerbie. This authority is Court of Justice itself. Al- the competent adjudicating matter, the ruling has im- beyond its effects on the self will be conducted. The ture of all the structures of s ruling, in fact, constitutes he way the US, Britain and the Se- d the Lockerbie crisis.

conducted by US authorities into ling the Lockerbie incident, on 14 epartment of Justice filed accusa- citizens implicated by the in- reat Britain then submitted official n of the Libyan suspects, and de- ed before Scottish or American omply, on the grounds that it had es with either of these two coun- standpoint, Libya's position was full conformity with established aw, according to which no state is citizens to be tried on the territory er state, unless compelled to do so ibya's only obligation under inter- national community as a whole. It cts in an extraterritorial crime are fer sufficient guarantees that their d just.

l natural and legitimate concerns e Libyan suspects could indeed be suspects government employees, worked for Libyan intelligence. If bviously be in the interest of the he suspects, since ultimately the and accused. Nor is the autonomy exactly above suspicion. Nev- nment did act to dispel doubts as te the suspects. It announced its be held in accordance with Scot- by a Scottish judge, but requested ral country. The US and the UK which reversed the picture and motives in aggravating the crisis.

listic standpoint, the US and the to the International Court of Jus- pute with Libya over the extradi- . The three state litigants in this e Montreal Treaty of 1971 per- civilian aircraft. This agreement, ghts and obligations in connection pulate that a state must hand over in the country in which the crime instance), or in the country to (the US in this instance) — or, foreign party. More importantly, parties to refer any dispute over visions of the treaty to the Inter- the US and the UK had done just n compelled to abide by the de-cision of the Court, had it ruled that Libya should hand over the suspects, present them for trial in a third country or offer certain guarantees as a condition for having them tried in Libya.

Evidently, however, the correct, legitimate course was too straightforward for the US and Britain. They opted instead to bring the dispute before the UN Security Council, which is a political, not a judicial, body. Moreover, they contested, before the International Court of Justice itself, its jurisdiction over the case, thereby obstructing justice for several years. If they had accepted the court's jurisdiction from the outset, a verdict would already have been pronounced on the Lockerbie case, and perhaps the trial would have revealed the identity of the true perpetrator of this horrible crime. In this context, the ruling of the International Court of Justice regarding its competency to adjudicate, contrary to American and British claims, is not merely a temporary setback for these two countries, but an explicit, harsh condemnation of their handling of the crisis and an acknowledgment that, at least in terms of formal and procedural aspects, Libya had acted correctly.

At another level, when the International Court of Justice pronounced its recent ruling, it was fully aware of the Security Council's condemnation of Libya and its resolutions invoking sanctions against that country in order to compel it to hand over the suspects. The Court itself had rejected a Libyan appeal that it take measures to prevent the US and Britain from forcing Libya to hand over the suspects. The primary reason the court offered for this refusal was that the circumstances surrounding the case were such that the court did not have the opportunity to exercise its jurisdiction. This ruling was to be expected, at any rate, even though it passed by a much narrower majority than did the ruling on jurisdiction in the Lockerbie case. If the Court had ceded to Libya's appeal for cautionary measures just after the Security Council had imposed sanctions against Libya, it would have put itself in direct confrontation with the Security Council. The Court therefore acted wisely in rejecting the Libyan appeal, in terms of political consonance as well as the interests of international legality. The International Court of Justice is not an authority above the Security Council, and does not have the jurisdiction to cancel Security Council resolutions. On the other hand, the Court's ruling on its competency in this dispute means that no other court has that jurisdiction. This sends an implicit message to the Security Council that it does not have the right to pursue the issue before the Court pronounces a ruling on the litigation before it. Again, therefore, the Court's recent ruling contains an implicit condemnation of the Security Council's handling of the Lockerbie case.

At any rate, the Security Council should have referred the entire case to the World Court from the outset. The dispute revolves around the interpretation of the provisions of the Montreal Treaty, which obliges its parties to bring such disputes before the International Court of Justice; but also, more pertinently, it is the right, indeed the duty, of the Security Council, to refer disputes of a legal nature to this Court, even in the absence of international agreements to that effect between the parties involved. The Security Council had no excuse for handling the affair as it did, and for allowing political considerations to prevail over legal considerations in a matter that was clearly of a judicial nature. The only explanation for the behaviour of the Security Council — a political body that expresses the will of its members — is that it submitted to the pressures exerted upon it by the US.

The discrepancy between juridical international legitimacy, as expressed by the International Court of Justice, and political international legitimacy, as expressed by the Security Council, could not be more glaring. Security Council resolutions, ostensibly a reflection of international legitimacy, are in fact a manifestation of arbitrary whim rather than the pursuit of justice. The gap between the Council's purported intent and its actual practices has raised many questions as to its credibility and legitimacy. The extent of this gap will become apparent in coming weeks, as the Security Council deliberates on the renewal of the sanctions that have weighed upon Libya for five years. Now that the International Court of Justice, through its recent ruling, has affirmed that the case is an international legal dispute falling under its jurisdiction, however, all other international bodies should refrain from taking further measures, and even from reviewing any measures, until the court pronounces its final verdict on the case.

Since the sanctions on Libya were promulgated before this recent ruling, and since the Court does not have the authority to annul the Security Council resolutions, the Council itself is really the only body that has the power to annul them. As the resolution against Libya must be subject to periodic review every three months, however, the next review period is certain to find the Security Council in a predicament. If it moves to renew the sanctions, it will have committed an intentional, blatant breach of the authority of the International Court of Justice by convicting, in effect, one of the parties in a dispute before the court. It would therefore be more appropriate, in view of considerations of political conformity within the UN, to freeze its previous resolution until the Court issues its verdict. Alternatively, it could approve Libya's suggestion, thereby acknowledging that Libya has met the demands of the Security Council, which in turn would automatically lift the sanctions.

Unfortunately, the official statements issued by the US and Britain indicate that these governments are adamant in adhering to their position, which has no legal basis and, indeed, contravenes the most elemental principles of democracy. The International Court of Justice's decision that this case falls under its jurisdiction does not mean that Libya has won the last round. Indeed, even if the suspects are tried in a third country, and even if the Court has to acquit them due to lack of sufficient evidence, the Libyan government will not necessarily have acquitted itself of involvement in an atrocious act of terrorism. Even in domestic court cases, the innocent are sometimes condemned, while the guilty go free due to procedural slip-ups. But such are the rules of the game, and we must revere and abide by them. Not least among these rules is the presumption of innocence until the suspect is proven guilty.

Britain and the US describe themselves as democratic, and they do in fact apply democratic principles and practices within their borders. Inside these countries, it is politically and legally impossible for the state to file charges against one of its citizens unless investigations have yielded sufficient cause for such charges; and it is certainly impossible for the state to condemn a suspect before he has stood a fair and just trial. It is strange that these same states should comport themselves internationally in a manner that conflicts so blatantly with the principles and practices they espouse at home. Contrary to their claims, these powerful nations, not the smaller nations, create the major impediment to democratic development. By sustaining the "law of the jungle", they impede, in Hobbes's words, the transition from the "state of nature" to the state of society at the international level. Their insistence on imposing their own law, rather than international law, nullifies the very basis of the global "social contract" from the outset and gives reign to international vandalism. It is an irony, in these bleak times, and in the context of the Lockerbie crisis in particular, that Libya should fall within the bounds of international law, while Britain and the US behave like outlaws.

Regardless of the future course of the Lockerbie crisis, however, the recent ruling of the International Court of Justice will, sooner or later, bring to the fore a few critical questions: the constitutionality of resolutions issued by the Security Council and the institution of a mechanism to subject the Council itself to political and legal scrutiny and accountability. Any executive authority will ultimately become a highly arbitrary and despotic power in the absence of a system of mutual checks and balances between the judicial, legislative and executive authorities. Expanding the membership of the Security Council alone is not sufficient. Without effective controls, even the most representative and credible authority will still have the capacity to abuse its powers. The current UN Charter gives the Security Council enormous powers, in some instances greater than those of the most dictatorially inclined regimes. The UN General Assembly does not have the political or legal leverage to impede the implementation of its decisions, and the International Court of Justice is not empowered to test the constitutionality of its resolutions against the text and spirit of the Charter, particularly those resolutions taken in accordance with Article 7. Perhaps, however, the rulings of the International Court of Justice on the Lockerbie case will open up an avenue for the reform of the imbalance in the UN.

The writer is professor of political science and international politics at Cairo University. The above article was written before the Security Council renewed the sanctions against Libya last Thursday.

Al-Ahram Weekly

Virtual reality

Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu has spent the past few weeks basking in the Middle East peacemaking lull forced by the flare-up of the US-Iraq confrontation. Israel seized this opportunity to sweep the faltering peace process under the carpet — one more step in an unrelenting effort to renege on its commitments under the 1993 Oslo Accord and subsequent agreements with the Palestinians. Now that the Gulf crisis is winding down, at least for the time being, there are increasing demands for a revival and acceleration of the peace process.

Sensing the pressure, Netanyahu has resorted to all kinds of diversionary tactics. He resurrected his pet proposal for an Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon on condition that the Beirut government dismantle the Hizbullah resistance fighters — a proposition he knows is a non-starter for both Lebanon and Syria. Although Netanyahu refuses any European role in the peace process, he went on a tour of Spain, Germany, Norway and Britain last week. His real aim was just to polish Israel's image in European capitals, where criticism of his peace policies was becoming more and more audible. But he blundered, blowing hot and cold about Europe's possible role in peacemaking, first belittling it and then welcoming it as helpful to US mediation.

In Oslo, Netanyahu paid lip service to the Accord, but he was widely seen in diplomatic circles there as bent on undermining it. In London, the government spokesman said Prime Minister Blair strongly urged Netanyahu to step up withdrawal of Israeli troops from the West Bank — more implicit criticism of Netanyahu's foot-dragging. Even at home, pressure has been building up. More than 1,500 retired army and police officers sent him a letter urging a halt to the construction of settlements in occupied lands. The letter said Netanyahu's persistence in his present policies "will cause us to question the righteousness of our path."

"My advice is: don't play games," President Hosni Mubarak bluntly warned Netanyahu in an interview with the Israeli newspaper *Maariv* this week. "Live in reality, not a world of illusions."

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Untying the Gordian knot

Red tape strangles the aspirations of Egyptians and cannot be allowed to continue doing so, writes Ibrahim Nafie

The Egyptian people have long entertained visions of striking out from the narrow confines of the Nile Valley and the Delta. Only in recent years, though, have these dreams come within reach. Indeed, the planners for our future have already begun to implement ambitious plans for the construction of new urban and agricultural societies on previously undeveloped tracts of desert land. Their efforts to redraw the map of our country with the creation of a New Valley will open to the Egyptian people vast horizons for initiative and creativity in all fields of industry, tourism and public services. Egypt thus stands poised to enter the 21st century with better prospects than ever for national prosperity.

However, the success of this venture demands we engage in an enterprise of a different order. The New Valley demands of us a new way of thinking, a move away from traditional structures and modes of behaviour that are no longer capable of responding effectively to the exigencies of change and progress.

Perhaps the Egyptian bureaucracy heads the list of structures that must adapt to these demands: it is in dire need of a fundamental overhaul. The structures of our bureaucracy will be greatly affected by the profound changes arising from the process of moving away from the old valley. Such a transition, moreover, requires modern, streamlined administrative structures and functions if our bureaucracy is to contribute to, rather than hamper, the economic development of our country. This, in turn, calls for a new consciousness, not only of its central role in promoting development, but of the composite prerequisites of this role: the availability of the appropriate skills and expertise, performance standards and professional ethics.

Administrative reform is one of the most complex challenges before us. Considerable daring, patience and wisdom will have to be called into play to untangle this intricate web and eradicate some of the most entrenched procrastination.

Administrative overlap and conflicting rules and regulations tend to subvert even well-intentioned plans. The time lag between promulgation of a decision and its implementation — if it ever gets implemented at all — causes endless attrition to individual and business interests and saps all enterprises of their credibility and lure.

The massive growth of bureaucracy has been intertwined with the increasing involvement of the state, during the totalitarian phase of our history, in all realms of social and economic activity. The sprawl of administrative departments and institutions this has engendered cannot be solved from one day to the next. It is an intricate structural problem that must be carefully analysed and delicately dismantled over a reasonable time span, in conjunction with the other structural transformations we must make.

Yet, one key towards solving this conundrum that effects so many aspects of our lives is to develop an awareness of the concept of public service. Government functionaries are there to serve the people. They are not intermediaries between the people and their rulers, with a license to gradually carve out a sphere of authority that entitles them to insolently obstruct the needs of the citizen, as though their power and prestige were the ultimate end rather than being at the service of the general welfare.

At the technical level, much must be done towards re-delineating the competencies of various administrative units in order to eliminate red tape and bureaucratic overlap. Such restructuring is also essential for providing clearer areas of responsiblity for the personnel themselves. This will go a long way to enhancing performance, since it will provide a framework for professional accountability and close the avenues to evasion of responsibility. Clearing away the dense undergrowth in government administration should enable our government employees to work to serve us better.

The gradual expansion of the private sector, which will effect virtually all aspects of our lives, including the service sectors that have been under state control, will eventually cause considerable reductions in the numbers of state employees. Government employment has also lost its lure for many of our young. Further reductions in the staffing levels of government administrations may also be expected, not only with the streamlining of departments and the reduction in red tape, but with the computerisation of many administrative tasks and the possible introduction of fax and telephone communications that would dispense with the need for direct contact with administrative personnel.

The introduction of modern communications and information equipment will require fundamental changes in the customary format of our timeworn forms, enabling the compilation of more effective databases and more efficient access to information. It is no longer outside the realm of the imagination to picture an end to the dusty, cavernous archives and endless red tape that render the extraction of a copy of your birth certificate a Herculean endeavour, let alone the procurement of approval for an investment project worth millions of dollars.

The emergence out of the old valley will offer us ample scope for change. The changes we embark upon will not so much be experiments as pioneering models for the way we will confront the complex heritage bequeathed to us by the oldest bureaucratic system in history. The ancient mentality of the old valley will not help us in building a new society. We need a new and audacious administration, free of ancient shackles, for the new stretches of land we are developing. We need a structural framework that encourages dynamic work, fruitful investment and a new life.

Fortunately, it is primarily our nation's young who will bring to bear their talents and energies in the process of building and establishing the traditions of this new society. In this respect, however, we need a bureaucracy not only capable of providing the climate for successful investment projects in the new valley, but of supporting the many public and social services required by the new society. Effective health, educational, security, transport, utility, entertainment and leisure facilities are only a partial list of the many important services needed to sustain a new society and to attract, not only our youth, but even more tourism, business and agriculture.

The success Egyptian bureaucracy meets in realising the large-scale enterprises before us will in itself rejuvenate and revitalise the administration and offer the best incentive for our long awaited administrative reform. If Egyptians are to make substantial changes in their lifestyle, then our bureaucracy too must change to accommodate a forward looking, pioneering spirit.

An Arab summit including Iraq

The peaceful settlement of the Iraqi crisis highlights the stalemate facing the Arab-Israeli peace process. Mohamed Sid-Ahmed discusses the rationale of this paradox

Although the Security Council resolution on Kofi Annan's mission to Baghdad was adopted unanimously, there are signs that opinions in the United Nations over how best to deal with the Iraqi crisis are far from unanimous. A recent development which underscores the deep divergences dividing the great powers was the return to Baghdad last Thursday of Scott Ritter, the man who sparked the crisis in the first place.

In a clear departure from the style of the United Nations secretary-general, and without his knowledge, the chief of the UNSCOM inspection teams, Richard Butler, appointed Ritter to head one of the inspection teams. It will be remembered that Ritter is the American weapons inspector who was accused by the Iraqi authorities of working for the CIA and whose debarring provoked the stand-off with the United States. Annan retaliated by appointing an Indian diplomat, Prakash Shah, to represent the secretary-general in Baghdad and to ensure that he has a direct line of communication with the Iraqi authorities, instead of leaving it to the inspection teams alone to report to the Security Council on Iraq's adherence to the UN resolutions.

It would thus appear that the Iraqi crisis is not limited to Iraq alone, or to Iraq's violation of post-Desert Storm UN resolutions, but that it is directly related to fundamental changes now underway in the world order; more specifically, to how far the United States can retain the status of unique superpower in the post-bipolar world order following the demise of the Soviet Union.

It might be true that no power today is capable of challenging the dominance of the United States. However, there are limitations on Washington's ability to impose its unilateral will in the international political arena, as was graphically illustrated during the recent Iraqi crisis. While Washington claimed to share the view of the other great powers on the need to try and resolve the crisis by peaceful means before resorting to a military strike, the actual behaviour of the American administration, not to mention several hawkish statements made by prominent US congressmen, gave a very different impression. Apparently Washington thought a military strike against Iraq would signal to all concerned that it could single-handedly bring into line any party that dared defy the rules of the unipolar world order. In other words, the warning was not addressed to Saddam Hussein alone, or to the Arab parties only, but also to any great power out to challenge America's status as the unique superpower in the present world order.

The issue at stake is therefore not regional, but global, and, though it is not openly put forward, the real question is whether our present world order should be unipolar or multipolar. Until this question has been satisfactorily resolved, it will continue to be the source of much malaise in international relations.

In a way, the Iraqi crisis was a litmus test for two antipodal crisis-resolution approaches: one approach, the multi-polar, believes in working out peaceful solutions of crisis situations based on some form of compromise that will enjoy consensus in both the Security Council and the General Assembly; the other approach is unipolar, that is, it believes that one power, namely, the United States, should call all the shots, and that all other parties should toe the line that it lays down.

It is worth contemplating here that if the multipolar approach, based on the idea of the peaceful settlement of conflicts, emerges victorious from the confrontation, this approach is bound to extend to other hot conflicts in the Middle East, most notably, of course, to the Arab-Israeli conflict. It is precisely because it is aware of this possible development that Israel, which practically single-handedly brought the peace process to a complete standstill, is now taking initiatives to restart the process on its own terms.

One such initiative is Netanyahu's recent proposal to pull out of south Lebanon. It appears Israel is now ready to implement Security Council Resolution 425 with the sole proviso that Lebanon guarantee to protect it from security threats from Hizbullah. However, Netanyahu is proposing to resume the peace talks not from where they left off, that is, on the Palestinian front, but on the Syrian/ Lebanese front where nothing has been accomplished so far. By addressing the Lebanese this time, not the Syrians, Netanyahu hopes to drive a wedge between Syria and Lebanon, placing Syria before the need to pull out of Lebanon if Israel pulls out at a time the peace process in the Middle East is still shrouded in uncertainties. Netanyahu has taken his bid still further by asking France to act as mediator, in the hope that this will embarrass French diplomacy and force it to move closer to the Israeli standpoint than to that of Lebanon or Syria.

The situation faces the Arab parties with the need to demonstrate that they can compete with Israel's peace initiatives, that they can, in fact, elaborate a more credible peace strategy. The Bush administration succeeded in launching the Madrid peace process in the aftermath of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on the premise that most Arab Gulf states saw Saddam Hussein as a greater evil than the Zionist state, and were willing to put their enmity to Israel on hold, if not to forgo it altogether, while they dealt with the Iraqi threat. But no Arab leader would now regard Netanyahu as a lesser evil than Saddam. It is time for inter-Arab conflict to be subordinated to the confrontation with Netanyahu.

The convocation of an Arab summit, including Iraq, would give an enormous boost to inter-Arab solidarity, and highlight the fact that, whatever the opinion of the various Arab parties concerning the Saddam regime, Arab reconciliation has precedence over any other consideration. It will also prove that the Arabs have finally learned that peace with Israel cannot be built on inter-Arab conflict, but that, quite the contrary, it must be based on a bedrock of inter-Arab solidarity.

Bar none

By Naguib Mahfouz

Now that the crisis in Iraq has been defused, and the situation has recovered some semblance of stability, we must ask what went wrong. If US allegations that Iraq possesses weapons of mass destruction are true, we have every right to ask why Iraq has insisted on maintaining its arsenal. The profound sense of insecurity in Iraq and the Arab world could be one reason. There is no doubt that this insecurity, created by Israel's possession of weapons of mass destruction, is both very real and founded on clear and present danger: the possibility of an Israeli strike on the Arab world. At the very least, the knowledge of Israel's overwhelming military superiority is sufficient to fuel fear and insecurity among the Arabs.

So far, Iraq's possession of weapons of mass destruction is not a confirmed fact, but there is no doubt that Israel possesses a vast arsenal of conventional and non-conventional weapons. Israel's nuclear capabilities are well known. Iraq may have procrastinated in allowing UNSCOM inspection teams access to certain sites, but Israel has absolutely and categorically dismissed US requests to inspect the nuclear reactor in Daimouna in the Naqab desert, "on principle".

In this context, therefore, there is little wonder that the Arab countries feel the need to defend themselves. They feel they must do so by stockpiling any weapons they can get hold of to bring their military might to the level of Israel's.

President Mubarak has called for the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction from all the countries of the Middle East, with no exceptions. Once such an arrangement is made, a large part of the problem will be solved.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week — Ending the boycotts

Akhbar El-Yom: "We must launch a new Arab initiative. A start could be made with an Arab declaration saying that in the wake of the decision of the International Court of Justice over Lockerbie, we will no longer be committed to the boycott of Libya. We will grant Iraq a few months to destroy any remaining weapons of mass destruction and to implement UN resolutions. We should also send a delegation from the Arab League to make sure that Iraq is fulfilling its commitments. If Iraq plays along, then the Arab states should lift their embargo on it and agree on an understanding ensuring the security of each Arab state and preventing what happened from reoccurring — a crisis which had everyone paying an exorbitant price."
(Galal Aref, 7 March)

Al-Wafd: "We thought the US would accept and respect the agreement reached between Baghdad and Kofi Annan. But it seems that Washington feels its dignity has been slighted and has proceeded to threaten to use the aid weapon against those who refused to follow blindly in its footsteps. The US stands to lose because Egypt has lived for a long time without US aid and its people are prepared to go it alone for many years to come."
(Editorial, 6 March)

Al-Shaab: "After our great victory over the Iraq issue, Israel is stealthily moving to avoid international pressure and to sow discord in the region by encouraging bloody feuds in Lebanon between those who want to see a separate Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon and those who do not. In this way Israel seeks to deprive the Syrians of the Hizbullah card and to postpone negotiations with the Palestinians because it is not prepared to offer any concessions to them although it has a definite interest in offering them to Lebanon."
(Adel Hussein, 6 March)

Al-Ahali: "The decision of the International Court of Justice on Lockerbie is a victory for Libyan diplomacy and Arab efforts in this regard. It is also a heavy blow to the law of the jungle which the US seeks to impose on the world. The decision means that all sanctions against Libya are now illegal and the Arabs should take advantage of this to lift the boycott against Libya and Iraq and compel Israel to implement resolutions calling for the withdrawal from occupied territories in Palestine, Syria's Golan Heights and south Lebanon without conditions."
(Lutfi Waked, 4 March)

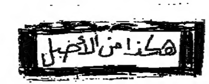
Al-Alam Al-Yom: "Annan's position on Iraq, the international court's position on Libya and US attempts to backpedal over its policies on Iran all point to the fact that the world's only superpower lacks wisdom and rationality in dealing with world issues. Will the White House review its policies after a series of recent blunders? This is the question we would like to ask."
(Farouk Guweida, 7 March)

Al-Ahram Al-Messaie: "So that it can make the Gulf states foot the bill for the recent military build-up, there is, from the US viewpoint, no going back on a military strike against Iraq. This has cost the US more than $1,000 million, and it will have to pay this out of its own pocket if it does not go ahead with the strike. And it is not strange that US public opinion should question this costly military build-up since Iraqi weapons — if any still exist — do not warrant such a build-up. All that is left to say is that sending Ritter at the head of a new inspection team could be the first step towards this scenario."
(Editorial, 7 March)

Compiled by **Galal Nassar**



Abdel-Rahman Mounif, the recipient of the Cairo Award for Fiction Writing, rarely looks overjoyed. Even his smile could be mistaken for a grimace of pain. I drew him in a melancholy mood, at any rate; his long, narrow face is marked by parentheses like concentric circles in a pool of water which could reflect his image, were it to grow still. His passion for writing consumes him, and his crew-cut shock of white hair resembles the incandescence which precedes an explosion.



هكذا من الأصل

Close up

Salama A. Salama

Solutions and suggestions

In his meeting with the Supreme Press Council, President Mubarak sought to convey the clear message that freedom of the press is guaranteed, and that the press remains unfettered in exercising its role, in accordance with the Constitution, the law and public interest. His words no doubt dispelled the clouds which had loomed over the meeting, and which may pass without compromising the environment of freedom and democracy which has been achieved under this government.

The president highlighted two matters which deserve considerable attention. First, he confirmed the press's responsibility to protect its freedom by itself by monitoring its own members. Second, he emphasised the government's readiness to introduce the amendments in relevant legislation necessary to foster freedom of the press.

Following these two guidelines, we need to review the loopholes that allow the press's reputation to be damaged, its role undermined, and impostors and mercenaries to work as journalists. There are several steps we could take to remedy these shortcomings.

It would be beneficial to activate the Supreme Press Council so that it may fulfil its functions on a regular basis. The Council has actually started holding regular meetings, an exercise which it should pursue. Previously, long stretches of slumber, lasting up to four years, were frequent. The Council's head, furthermore, should be independent from the Shura Council.

The Council should also be vested with the power to issue licenses for newspapers established locally or overseas. Such a measure would close the gaps which have inflated the role of the Ministry of Information, considered to be at the root of our current problems.

Each political party should be permitted to publish one party newspaper. A mechanism enabling the control of the sale and purchase of newspaper licenses as a means of profiteering should be put in place.

All newspapers should be subject to labour legislation, to the statute of the Press Syndicate and to review by the Auditor-General. These measures will counteract the commercialisation of the press and halt financing from dubious sources (foreign countries or businessmen with agendas of their own).

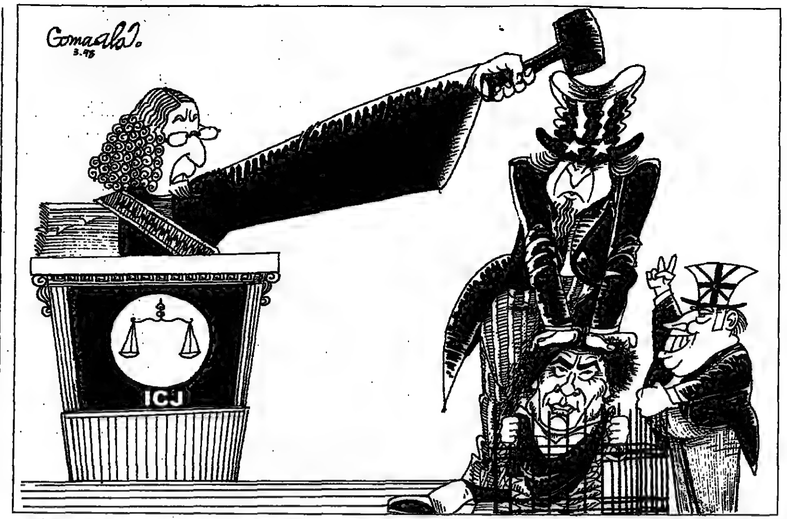
The State of the Press, the report published by the Supreme Press Council, should inform the public of the errors and offences committed by certain publications, thus rewarding reliability and integrity.

The Supreme Press Council should consider complaints sent by individuals or organisations and take action within a reasonable time span.

Prison sentences for press offences should be replaced by the payment of fines and compensation. Ceilings should be removed to ensure that penalty is commensurate with the material, moral or social damage resulting from libel, defamation and sedition. Penalties could include the closure of the newspaper.

Courts competent to take action in publication and press offences, similar to the judicial bodies which rule on matters such as the embezzlement of public funds, must be set up. The appointment of a prosecutor to investigate actions of libel brought against newspapers and journalists should also be envisaged. Such measures would expedite court rulings and thus prevent arbitrary administrative decisions currently justified on the grounds of lengthy court proceedings.

Strangely, after pontificating about freedom and responsibility and pointing fingers at the tabloids, journalists sit back and wait for President Mubarak to redress the errors. Such errors would have been redressed automatically if every journalist had remained vigilant and conscientious.



Soapbox

Letter and spirit

The debate over Law 32 was triggered by a new climate of open dialogue facilitated by Egypt's hosting of the ICPD and its NGO Forum. From the government's point of view, Law 32 was instituted as a tool to both control and guide those NGOs that implement the national development plans — the ultimate concern being considerations of national security and the protection of public funds, within a centralised conception which gives the state total responsibility for the welfare of the people, including the "poorest of the poor".

The result was a weakening of the spirit of voluntarism and initiative. The law constrained mobility and freedom of voluntary association, networking outside sectoral boundaries, true participation and the ability to mobilise public opinion in favour of major human rights issues.

The Egyptian government and NGOs have finally come to agree on the importance of changing Law 32 in the interest of national development and citizen participation in civil society. In fact, a process is now underway in cooperation with NGOs to prepare a new law.

Furthermore, the Egyptian government's attitude towards NGOs seems to have shifted toward recognising them as partners in development rather than social service providers.

But NGOs now realise that the best law in the world, by itself, does not ensure the resolution of their problems. The understanding and attitude of those who interpret and implement the law within an enabling or disabling social environment is at least as important.

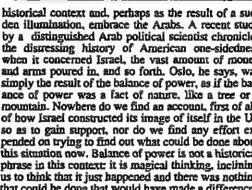


This week's Soapbox speaker is the chairperson of the National NGO Commission for Population and Development.

Aziza Hussein

Making history: constructing reality

People make their own history — a people's 'fate' in history is not determined by 'magical' forces beyond their control, be they gods and demons, grand conspiracies or an immutable 'balance of forces'. Zionists know this, writes **Edward Said**, it is time Palestinians and Arabs did



Separated from each other by well over three hundred years and the Mediterranean Sea, Ibn Khaldun, who died in 1406 at the age of 74, and Giambattista Vico, a Neopolitan philosopher who died in 1744, nevertheless held astonishingly similar views of history, both of which still have great relevance today. Vico's book, *The New Science*, was published a year after his death, remained relatively unknown until the late eighteenth century, and was then discovered by the French historian Jules Michelet, who translated it into French. Since that time numerous major figures in European thought — Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Croce, Freud, James Joyce, Beckett, and many others — were in some way indebted to Vico's profound insight that human beings make their own history, a history that can therefore be understood by human beings scientifically and according to laws of context, development and understanding. Thus it would be wrong, Vico said, to judge the primitive world of Homer by the more advanced rational world of Aristotle. Humankind begins in barbarism, moves to sociability as provided by families, and then achieves social solidarity, what Ibn Khaldun who identified the same stages called *'asabiya*.

The essential point for both men is that the world of human beings is neither the world of nature, nor the sacred world which is made by God, but the world of history, a secular world that can be understood rationally as the result of transformations, stabilities, and upheavals that are governed by observable laws and human actions. Historical understanding is the comprehension of what human beings do and what they cannot do. In a famous passage Ibn Khaldun makes fun of Mas'udi who had an entirely fanciful idea of how Alexander first descended in to the Mediterranean to frighten sea monsters so that he could then build Alexandria. In other words, historical truth has to be plausible, it must be able to place events in the proper context, it must be free of exaggeration, it must not be partisan, it must focus on what human beings did, and so on.

Although this brief summary makes these two great thinkers appear simple enough to accept, the fact is that we are still struggling with the consequences of their profound insights, especially in the Arab world, but elsewhere too. Notions of conspiracy, divine intervention, heroic individuals impede our capacity for understanding that history is made by human effort, not magic or mysterious forces that act mysteriously. This may seem like an unarguable reality but if we pay close attention to some of the explanations that are passed off today as explanations for, let us say, American and Israeli behaviour we will conclude that these explanations are really quite far from rational, secular, or plausible.

In its dealings with the Arab world the United States has been governed by pressures and interests, and not simply by a Zionist plot, or an immoral disregard for Palestinian rights, which is certainly there. As I have said frequently here, it is one of the most illogical things for Arab leaders to throw themselves on the mercy of the United States just because it is powerful and seems to speak a language of official morality. That, in my opinion, is an example of magical thought, the assumption that some leader somewhere will overturn the logic of interests and pressures, jump out of a historical context and, perhaps as the result of a sudden illumination, embrace the Arabs. A recent study by a distinguished Arab political scientist chronicles the distressing history of American one-sidedness when it concerned Israel, the vast amount of money and arms poured in, and so forth. Oslo, he says, was simply the result of the balance of power, as if the balance of power was a fact of nature, like a tree or a mountain. Nowhere do we find an account, first of all, of how Israel constructed its image of itself in the US so as to gain support, nor do we find any effort expended on trying to find out what could be done about this situation now. Balance of power is not a historical phrase in this context: it is magical thinking, inclining us to think that it just happened and there was nothing that could be done that would have made a difference.

The missing factor here is the role of will in the creation of power in human affairs, which both Vico and Ibn Khaldun well understood. Will operates aggressively as well as defensively. The core idea of Zionism, as Zeev Sternhell shows in an important new book called *The Founding Myths of Israel: Nationalism, Socialism, and the Making of the Jewish State*, was conquest. This is clear in Ben Gurion's rhetoric. It is also clear in the language of Berl Katznelson, the major theorist of Labour Zionism who openly proclaimed in 1929 that "the Zionist enterprise is an enterprise of conquest." He then adds that "it is not by chance that I use military terms when speaking of settlement." To this end the Zionist movement sought, consolidated, and deployed power consistently. This was as true in Palestine as it was after 1948 when it was clear that the new state of Israel required sustained support from abroad, especially from the United States. This will to power and conquest must be understood as the conscious, systematic creation of men and women dedicated to keeping hold of a conquered territory. Far from it being a matter of luck, or coincidence or conspiracy, it was — and still is — announced as the goal of every major Israeli leader of the Right or of the Left: in this respect Netanyahu is cruder, but really no different than Ben Gurion or Rabin. One of the main misunderstandings of those Palestinians who negotiated the Oslo Accords was not that they weren't aware of the balance of power, but that they were ignorant of the detailed circumstances of the Israeli military conquest and occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, the Golan Heights and Jerusalem. If they would have known them, they would have seen clearly that Oslo was designed to get Palestinian approval for an extension of those circumstances into the heart of a formal peace agreement between Israel and the PLO. Everything we now know about what happened in Oslo suggests that the Palestinian leadership believed that it was getting a state, whereas the Israelis in fact were planning exactly the opposite. In such circumstances, will, conscious effort, preparation and coordinated effort played a predictable role, and the absence of those things resulted in the state of affairs we have before us in which Israel has conceded only 3 per cent of West Bank land (without sovereignty) and states openly that it will annex most of the rest.

The point to be made here is that Israel and the United States planned deliberately to use power and will to continue injustice against the Palestinians. The question then is if this situation was made by human beings, and is not an act of God or a fact of nature, is there any way of dealing with it that does not perpetuate the injustice?

I think the answer is yes, but, once again, by conscious, secular and rational means, not by waiting for a miracle or a great leader or some unforeseen intervention, none of which can be expected in what Vico and Ibn Khaldun studied as the world of the nations, the secular world, which is governed by human effort that can be analysed and understood rationally and historically. The influential English cultural critic Raymond Williams once said that no social system, no matter how repressive, can exhaust every social alternative that might contradict or resist it. The same is true of the United States where, despite the power of the Israeli lobby and the converging interests of that lobby with the strategic aims of the US as characterised by the corporate and defense communities, there is an important sector of the population that is perplexed and angry that Israel should be getting away with so many infractions of what are stated US policies, policies about human rights abuses, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, illegal annexation of territory, and so on. What we need to ask ourselves is why has this alternative constituency never been systematically addressed by the Arabs and Palestinians? Why have our leaders and renowned intellectuals and political scientists always believed that one should address only the "policy makers" and "senior officials," and leave the rest of the population unattended to? Never having lived in the West or in a democracy they do not understand the way power operates, not as the result of military force but as the result of mobilised opinion, the movement of ideas, the relationship between interests and ideas, and between institutions and values. As I said in an earlier article, the Zionists grasped the importance of opinion in the modern world, and sought to influence the largest possible number of people in the West by bombarding them with images of Israel as a pioneering democratic state, built on empty, neglected or uninhabited land, surrounded by violent Arabs who wanted to drive Jews into the sea. Ninety per cent of the Western electorate still does not know that there is a Law of Return only for Jews, that Israel was built on the ruins of Palestinian society, and that only Jews (at the expense of the indigenous inhabitants) can benefit from the institutions of the state, especially so far as landowning is concerned.

Yes, the importance of holding on to our land is crucial, but no less crucial is the need to undermine the morality of Israel's military occupation, now almost 32 years old and which is opposed by many Israelis, as well as supporters of Israel in the West. The enemies of South African apartheid did exactly that by campaigning in universities, churches, corporations, in the media; thus did South Africa's discrimination against non-whites become a public, moral cause. We have never even tried to organise such a campaign on a mass level, partly because we have not understood its importance, partly also because many of us still refuse to see the connection between power, will, and injustice, and refuse therefore to see the reverse that power and will can be harnessed to resistance and to the cause of justice.

There is nothing else on the horizon, which is more bleak than it has ever been. We are getting weaker, we are slowly being overtaken and forgotten, our resolve is in danger of succumbing to the sullen silence of other defeated native peoples. And yet a proper reading of history teaches us that even though the balance of power is unfavorable, the weaker can overcome the stronger because of the human factor, that is, the will to resist, to seek new and ingenious ways to fight injustice, to be relentless in energy and hope. I think we should draw support from the fact that despite years of oppression and dispossession we continue to exist as a people, and our voice can still be heard. That should encourage us to go on — critically, consciously, creatively. Above all, we must always remember to read history as the record of what men and women did, and what they did not do.

Like success, failure is made, and is not simply an automatic thing: failure has to be constructed and worked at until it becomes a habit and a commitment. It is neither a matter of genes nor of "destiny." By the same token, we can commit ourselves to changing our situation not by force of arms, which we do not possess and cannot foreseeably possess in requisite strength, but by a mass movement of people determined by political, moral, non-violent means to prevent our further ghettoisation and hopeless drift. There are hundreds of thousands of Palestinians everywhere who are in principle prepared to sound the message that men and women will listen to and are interested in understanding. Because of its historical, cultural and religious significance Palestine is a perennially renewed, open-ended symbol of the possibility of diversity, pluralism, and creative balance. To have expected Zionism to rise to Palestine's challenge on human and political grounds was idealistic, maybe even ingenuous and naive. But I remain convinced that if as Palestinians we make it clear that we are prepared with the Jews of Israel and Arab people in the surrounding region to make a new kind of history based on a new politics of integration and inclusion, we can carry the day. It is slow, hard work, but it is doable and, I think, achievable in the best sense. To settle for less would be a terrible mistake whose consequences are evident all around us.

To The Editor

Missing the *Weekly*

Sir- While preparing to leave Cairo after three years, it has gradually dawned on me how much I will miss the *Al-Ahram Weekly*. In my opinion, it is the best English-language paper there is at expressing an Arab viewpoint on key Middle East issues. It also provides much-needed balance to the dominant views of most Western papers. While I do not always agree with your writers' views, I always find them provocative and they have greatly broadened my perspective.

Given the prestige of your paper and the importance of giving the writings of your journalists broader distribution, why is it taking you so long to come out with an online version? How can you compete in the modern day marketplace of ideas with American, European, Israeli and even far inferior Arab papers, which have been online for years? In my view, no newspaper which strives for influence in this era should be without a web edition.

From my next home in Latin America I hope to be able to read *Al-Ahram Weekly* on the day it is published, rather than weeks later when it is available by mail and when many of the ideas have been overtaken by events. Isn't it time you published on the web?

P. Carpenter
Cairo
pcarpent@eis1.eis.com.eg

When the Web?

Sir- As I always enjoy reading the *Weekly*, I wondered whether you have thought of placing it on the web, so that the valuable information and analysis it provides could be made available more widely? I think you should do so.

David J. Pervin
Arlington, VA
djper@hotmail.com

Our web site is currently under construction and readers should be able to access it in the near future.

The editor

The little fellow

Sir- May I congratulate Edward Said on his article "Gulliver comes east" (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, 26 February - 4 March) — a superb introduction to Jonathan Swift's 'Gulliver's Travels', a literary masterpiece with which I was previously unacquainted. Like a magnet, Said's masterly essay has lured me to read Swift's work, if only to follow the parallels with the political chess moves in the Iraqi crisis we have just lived through which the eminent professor of comparative literature has discovered in the story of giants and dwarfs.

May I also congratulate Hani Shukrallah for not mincing his words in his stinging article, "Killing the messenger".

Mona Shaheen
Zamalek

Dyeing on their feet

Sir- I am a very faithful reader of the *Weekly*, and there is nothing in it that I don't read. I must congratulate you on the high standard of your reporting, your analyses, your entertainment pages, your choice of subjects, and last but not least, the excellent and very sophisticated quality of the language. I wish to add that not only do I read your paper faithfully, but I also send it sometimes in its entirety, sometimes selected articles from it, to friends abroad, who are invariably very impressed with what they read.

This time I wish to comment on the article by Eman Abdel-Moeti (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, 19-25 February), on the lamentably poor showing of our TV anchormen and especially women. They are the main thing that put me off watching our local channels. I am sad to see that anchorwomen and presenters on other Arab channels are doing a much better job, and look infinitely better than our over-made-up, overweight, over-dressed, narcissistic, obviously disinterested, condescending and at times painfully uninformed TV personalities.

With all due respect to Mrs Suheir El-Etribi, the other Arab channels do represent strong competition, for even though they employ a number of Egyptians, their conception of television is much more in tune with modern trends and their criteria for quality are much more stringent than ours. Mrs El-Etribi and Mrs El-Zommor are dishing out some very lame arguments to justify the poor performance on our channels. Farida El-Zommor's excuses — the low salaries (sic!!), the lack of opportunities, the necessary dyeing of hair and the weight problem ("because they have no hope of real opportunity coming their way") — convince no one. There is nothing wrong with dyeing one's hair, for a TV presenter at any age must look neat and well-groomed, but dyeing it ash blond or carrot red *is* a problem!

If these ladies dieted and exercised so as to fall within the accepted norms of weight, if they emulated their sisters on other channels and wore elegant but simple clothes, if they toned down their extravagant hairstyles, if they tried not to look like decorated Christmas trees, and especially if they researched their subjects thoroughly before presenting their programmes, and treated their guests with respect, maybe they would get the better opportunities that seem to elude them now.

Djenane Kamil
Maadi
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Joys and sorrows

Sir- I was overjoyed to read in your paper about the protests of the entire world against the attitude of the US concerning the Iraq crisis and the UN weapons inspectors — and especially the protests of the American people themselves. In Ohio, the political leadership of the Pentagon and Secretary of State Albright sought to win popular support for air strikes against Iraq, but — surprisingly — their endeavours failed.

The secretary of state continued her campaign to convince the American people, and the world continued to admonish the US for even thinking of implementing such threats.

I was also happy to see the British people demonstrating against the barbarity of the West's attitude toward Iraq, and in defence of Iraqi children and women, the helpless victims of their regime's irrational arrogance.

Yet I feel most sad that the country which claims to sponsor the peace process in the Middle East, and which is itself a great civilisation, should seek to perpetrate genocide against a peaceable people in a bid to punish its ruler.

In a world increasingly indignant at these double standards, let us hope that diplomatic endeavours will succeed in convincing the obdurate Iraqi regime to comply with the injurious Article 7 of the UN — or rather US — Charter, which is always inapplicable — except to the Arabs.

Mohamed Amin
Beni Suef


photo: Sherif Sonbol

David Blake gets goose flesh

Birds of a feather

Trio Kazazian: Auditorium of the French Cultural Centre, Mounira; 4 March

The bird of thrills, the goose, did come about halfway through this concert which began with one long held pedal note, unending and forming a sort of ground rest upon which the Kazazian trio could spin their webs of galactic noise.

There is nothing usual about this music, yet for a time it seemed we might be in India. The trio consists of Alain Robert, percussion, Nagah Abdel-Hamid, *mizmar*, and Georges Kazazian, *oud*. His particular way of assembling these sounds permits great freedom to each individual player, again an Indian custom. They each avail themselves of this with remarkable subtlety. So the musical web is fine spun, airy and ever-changing.

On the floor in front of them are spread the instrumental objects upon which, from time to time as the music progresses, they etch out for the listener the peculiar landscapes that float along and around. It is mostly peaceable: things are suggested: night, day, stars, fissures of dark empty yawning space. And the rhythms, very strong, are constantly varying. There are many, many rhythms: water space, landscape or sky motifs. The players suggest this. In these sounds, nothing is struck — no keyboards, no wind or brass — and no humanistic climaxes are made. The pedal note and its overhead embroidery flow on forever, not hovering but changing shape and shadow all the time.

One of the instruments, like a green open book, is used alternatively by each player. It is a sort of book of the ages — gently tuning the pages and the pedal notes of destiny, and everything moves along. This movement is a strange force of the Kazazian trio. Everything is going along someplace, but where is never vouchsafed.

Far away, drum beats sound over the spaces of the landscape. Nothing moves but these sounds, and they never sound like notes or things from man-made instruments. Man, really, isn't much around. There are bells of silver, birds flying and spirals weaving in and out of each other, but all carefully played. The compositional art is very finely spun and composed, but its final effect is of air: no notes show. Resistant to any rational explanation. Comparisons with this music are all that is possible. Carter, sometimes, John Cage in far out mood, or even Nancarrow, but even these composers sooner or later seem to come up against humanity. Kazazian does not. His things are emotions netted from the air.

The concert had short gaps between the five separate sessions. The players have the fixed, dug-in aspect of early jazz trios. One time maybe the Kazazian trio will come up against Miles Davis or Dizzy Gillespie and the effect could be a space voyage in a Cairo capsule because there is something very Cairo about this music, a Cairo undiscovered so far except by Kazazian himself.

The first three sections of the concert were spacious voids, the latter ones began filling up with ominous sounds. Uneaseful drummings, things, objects being smashed. Even rooms, seemingly only a few streets away, were in trouble. Trembling, a little flute plays fitfully, disembodied and fearful. The percussion seems to be wearing gray suede gloves. There is menace broken by a tambourine full of pebbles and nuts, rattling around and turning into waves breaking on a dark Californian beach. Midnight. It all shoots away. Alone in a big city. Is there one left? Things close in, rooms shrink. The green book is not from India. It is a police record of lifers. If you can stand it and can't sleep and feel alone, then Kazazian's music sneaks in beside you and, lo, you are off on von Humbolt's *Travels in Brazil*. But mind, there's a boa constrictor in the corner ready to strike. Goose flesh comes. No further contacts were made with the Kazazian trio.

Swan Lake: Cairo Opera Ballet Company and Cairo Opera Orchestra; Mostafa Nagui, conductor; Abdel-Moneim Kamel, director; Main Hall, Cairo Opera House; 6 March

Swans are horrible birds — dirty, untidy, evil-tempered and trouble making. But myth envelops even their ugliness. The king of swans is Lohengrin's, swirling through the bedrooms of newlyweds on their wedding nights and causing conjugal chaos.

The swans of the ballet are a pair of queens. The Black Swan, Odile, gets to spinning the famous 32 fouettés at the climax of the story. Odette, the White Swan, a true queen they say, ends up getting to marry the Prince Siegfried. Which isn't all it's cracked up to be, given he prefers queens of a darker hue.

Erminia Kamel, white, and Era Prokoponko, black. Unlike swans, both have perfect legs. Prokoponko was brilliant, cold and strong as the secret agent of Rotenbart, the public relations officer of the foul fiend below. At the ending he joins the foul fiend in a dazzling red explosion of scarlet fog. Any queen would be pleased to be rid of him. This leaves the white queen and her prince to go majestically off to live in Hohenswanghau Castle by a Bavarian lake.

Swan Lake is so popular it has gone into drag musicals. Strange fate for the Tchaikovsky score. The Abdel-Moneim Kamel version of the story is also getting further and further from the original rodemontade. Not surprising — who knows what to do with queens these days, even when they do have feathers?

This production lets them flounce and strut which is hard on Erminia Kamel who is a fine dancer and subtle actress. For her even the psycho-somatic Giselle going bonkers in a farmyard offers more scope. Rotenbart, the evil genius, has a strong personality in Sergy Blonsky. He swoops about with relish and makes the baddy the enjoyable one.

Dimitry Damazirof as Prince Siegfried is a problem for the production. In class and rehearsal he is strong, rugged and powerful. On stage, he seems to have undergone bleach treatment. White, pale and pedantic, his walk is almost a century out of date. He is unfailingly exact, elevation high, with silent landings; as soloist every position is perfect and as a partner he is strong and reliable. So who bleached the Prince?

Production and costumes are, as usual with the ballet, very tailored and look immaculate. The scene of the four small boys in white court dress leading their princesses around the stage in the first act is a sweet Russo-Egyptian touch. The boys looked splendid enough to set their mothers' hearts aflame with ambition.

But the stars of the show are the corps de ballet. They have always been a joy to watch but have now developed into a strong team, lighting up the production every time they come on stage. All are tall, perfectly proportioned, free ranging dancers. But what sets them higher than even their visual allure is their spirit. Keeping to routine, they nevertheless jump and soar and fill the theatre with energy and poetry. So the goose made further appearances thanks to the corps de ballet of the opera.

Theatre

Fleurs du mal

Nehad Selaiha finds little that is good in Alfred Farag's *The Good and the Bad*, currently at Al-Salam Theatre

For many years, the majority of resident actors in the state-theatre companies have been bitterly complaining of un- or under-employment. Many have not worked in their companies for years and have had to supplement their meagre salaries by work outside, mostly in radio and occasionally in television. The lucky few who are sporadically allowed to tread the boards often do so in minor, insignificant parts that give them little satisfaction and make no impact. The fact that the annual output of state productions has drastically diminished over the years is no doubt partly responsible for this sad waste of good talent. Equally responsible, however, has been the rapidly increasing commercial drive of the state theatre. This has resulted in a string or, rather, a thin trickle of spectacular, light musical comedies built round a star (whose fat contract ate up most of the budget), and quite indistinguishable from the usual fare you get at most of the commercial companies. Inevitably, and quite predictably, ticket-prices had to be raised to cope with the new inflated costs and became prohibitive to most students, young people and a vast section of the population. Ironically, we have ended up with two types of commercial companies: one run by private citizens who fund it out of their own pockets and accept all the risks involved and the other run by the state and funded out of the tax-payer's money for the benefit of the rich and well-to-do.

In the public discussion over the future of the Egyptian theatre, held at the East International Book Fair, this absurdly paradoxical situation was made abundantly clear. Most of the questions and comments received by the panel had to do with the prices of admission and the type and quality of the shows on offer, whether at the private or state theatres. One young person sardonically wondered if dancing had become obligatory in theatre; another bemoaned the dismal lack of variety and the complete disappearance of the classics of world drama; many candidly admitted that their only acquaintance with theatre was through what was broadcast on television and what is written about it in the papers. Ironically, as playwright Lenin El-Ramly (who has his own company) pointed out, the state—rather than encourage the private theatres to raise their standards, expand their dramatic range, and cater to different tastes and audiences by offering subsidies or tax-reliefs—has viciously decided to put them out of business by providing precisely the same kind of entertainment and targeting the same audience. In corroboration, director Saad Ardash cynically added that in the past novels were sometimes adapted for the stage; but nowadays it has become not just fashionable but almost mandatory to adapt plays originally written for the stage to make them into variety shows or extravaganzas.

The consistent response of the State-Theatre Organisation to the repeated outcries of the critics and the public has been: if you do not like it, you can lump it. Even though the concept of theatre as a cultural service and not a commercial enterprise which originally informed this huge governmental apparatus has long been dead and buried, as many of its successive heads have candidly (though privately) admitted, it still remains with us like the bloated, expanding corpse in Ionesco's *Amedée ou Comment S'En Débarrasser* (*Amedée, or How to Get Rid of It*).

It was bad enough to find the current head of the organisation (an honest, upright man and distinguished literary critic) publicly defending his 'starist' policy two weeks ago and boasting about box-office returns (the new criterion of value and success); but it was even worse and more disheartening to learn that even distinguished playwrights like Alfred Farag could not withstand the commercial tide and that he had succumbed to market pressures.

The Good and the Bad (Farag's 27th play, published by Dar Al-Hilal, August '94) was originally written in Farag's inimitable brand of classical Arabic - an innovative blend of classical and Egyptian Arabic syntactical and tonal variations, inspired by and reminiscent of the language of *The Arabian Nights* and other folk narratives. He used it with great success in 1964 in *The Barber of Baghdad*, the first of five comedies he based on stories from *The Nights*. The last of these was *The Good and the Bad* and, in print, it is equal in grace, charm and humour even to *The Barber*. The story is simple enough: it pits the crafty, unconscionable dyer, Bakeer, against his kind, innocent neighbour, the barber, Baseer, and the action, which consists of a series of humorous adventures and hilarious scrapes, involving shipwrecks and miraculous escapes, is propelled and held together by the good barber's obsessive, and almost fanatical desire to reform his friend and save his soul, and the tenacious determination of the incorrigible dyer to hold on to his wickedness and avoid any such fate. As the play progresses, the initial moral definitions of both characters are seriously questioned until they finally explode. And the wonderful thing is that both characters remain charming and quite sympathetic until the end.

No one can accuse *The Good and the Bad* of being abstruse, highbrow or in any way inaccessible. Like all of Farag's work, it is highly theatrical and belongs solidly in the tradition of popular theatre. And yet its language was deemed by some (who undoubtedly must think that the average Egyptian spectator has a brain the size of a chicken's) as too difficult and off-putting. Accordingly, Farag was asked to rewrite the play in the Cairene vernacular and, shockingly, he complied. But the lovely original dialogue, with its subtle, delicious flavour, was not the only thing to go; with it went the songs, which Farag had written into the text, to be replaced by others from the pen of a colloquial poet.

The play I saw at Al-Salam seemed a pale and soulless immitation of the one I had read. The characters were the same, as were the episodes, the content of the dialogue and the basic ideas. Even the stage-directions concerning the set and the places for the songs and dances were faithfully followed by director Ahmad Abdel-Halim. But something was sadly missing — call it the spirit of the work — and nothing, not even the beauty of Sawsan Badr (as the barber's wife), the live music of Ali Saad, or the riveting, charismatic presence of Yehya El-Fakharani as the dyer could make up for what the play had lost in the re-writing.

The Good and The Bad may be a commercial success as the head of the State-Theatre Organisation proudly boasted; but it is the kind of success one has to buy at a tremendous cost in terms of artistic integrity.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Djehane Raouf (Paintings)
Salama Gallery, 36/A Ahmed Orabi St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 5242. Daily 10am-2.30pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 12 March.
Floral designs under the title I Will Survive.

Collective Exhibition
Sheba Gallery, Apt 1, 6 Sri Lanka St, Zamalek. Tel 340 9192. Daily exc Sun, 10am-8pm. Until 12 March.

Akhmim Arts & Handicrafts
Association of Upper Egypt for Education and Development, 65 Al-Obessi St, Daher. Daily 12noon-8pm. Until 12 March.
Products from the Community Centre of Akhmim and the Youth Centre of Hagaza.

Sherif Abdel-Badie
Espace Gallery, 1 Al-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm; Fri 6pm-9pm. Until 13 March.

Abdel-Aziz El-Guindi (Paintings)
Ragab Gallery, 3 Al-Nil St, behind Cairo Sheraton, Giza. Daily 9am-3pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 15 March.

Collective Exhibition
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 Al-Sheikh Al-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 10am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 18 March.
Photographs of Yemen by architect Sonato Lorusso, of Usbekistan by Lucio Rispoli and of Italy by Hany El-Gowely.

Gamil Shafiq (Drawings) & **Halim Yacoub** (Sculpture)
Khan El-Maghrabi Gallery, 18 Al-Mansour Mohamed St, Zamalek. Tel 340 3349. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-3pm & 4.30pm-9pm. Until 20 March.

Mounir El-Shaarani (Calligraphy)
Cairo Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef Al-Gundi St, Bab Al-Louq. Tel 393 1764. Daily exc Sun, 12noon-3pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 20 March.

Indian Photographs
Al-Hanager, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Opening 15 March, 8pm. Daily 10am-10pm. Until 21 March.

Mohsen Shaalan (Paintings)
Spiro Arts Gallery, 6 Rd 77C, Golf Area, Maadi. Tel 351 4362. Daily 10am-9pm. Until 22 March.

The Greeks of Alexandria (Photographs)
General Consulate of Greece in Alexandria, 63, Al-Eskandar Al-Akbar St, Shatby, Alexandria. Daily exc Sun, 4pm-8pm; Sat 10am-1pm. Until 22 March.

Salah Enani (Paintings)
Akhnatoun Gallery I, Centre of Art, 1 Al-Mashad Al-Swissri St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8211. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1.30pm & 5.30pm-9.30pm. Until 22 March.
Works under the title Open Buffet.

Giuseppe Crisolini Malatesta
Cairo Opera Gallery, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel (information) 339 8144. Daily 10am-2pm & 7.30pm-10pm. Until 22 March.
Theatre set designs by the Italian artist, including those of the Barber of Seville, currently performing at the Opera House.

Maria Adamantidis
Ewart Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436. Daily exc Fri, 9am-9pm. Until 23 March.
A photographic tour of the Greek establishments in Cairo under the title The Greeks and Cairo: Places of the Heart.

Rehab El-Sadek (Installations)
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St, Downtown. Tel 578 4494. Daily exc Fri, 11am-9pm. Until 26 March.
Works under the title Pages From Old Times.

Bernard Guillot
Sony Gallery, American University in Cairo, Main Campus, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5424. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 26 March.
Thirty-one black and white photographs under the title Egypt: A Fertile Land of scenes from the countryside in the Egyptian Delta, capturing qualities of the fellah such as his freedom, his perception, his dignity and his culture of the soil.

Said El-Sadr
Extra Gallery, 3 Al-Nessim St, corner of Montaza St, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 26 March.

Rabab Nimr
Khan Al-Maghrabi Gallery, 18 Al-Mansour Mohamed St, Zamalek. Tel 340 3349. Opening 17 March. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-9pm. Until 3 April.
Works under the title Black:White.

Hazem El-Mestikawy (Sculpture)
Espace Gallery, 1 Al-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Opening 17 March, 7pm. Daily exc Thur, 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 8 April.

Fabrizio Clerici
Akhnaton Gallery, Centre of Art, 1 Al-Mashad Al-Swissri St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8211. Opening 14 March. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1.30pm & 5.30pm-9.30pm. Until 14 April.
Oils, watercolours, mixed media and lithographs by a surrealist in the tradition of de Chirico.

FILMS

French Films
French Cultural Institute, 1 Madraset Al-Hoqouq Al-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679.
12 & 15 March, 7pm: Nous Ne Vieillirons Pas Ensemble.
16 March, 7pm: Les Ailes Du Désir, directed by Wim Wenders.

Italian Films
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 Al-Sheikh Al-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791.
14 March, 7pm: La Messa E Finita.
15 March, 7pm: Nuovo Cinema Paradiso (1989).

Qandil Om Hashem (The Lamp of Om Hashem)
Goethe Institute, 5 Abdel-Salam Aref St, Bab Al-Louq. Tel 575 9877. 18 March, 6.30pm.

Notice:
Some commercial cinemas now change their programmes every Wednesday, others every Monday. The information provided is valid at the time of going to press. It is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For more information, contact the venue.

Titanic
Drive In, Entrance of Al-Shorouq City, Cairo-Ismailia desert road. Tel 012-216 0831. Daily 6pm, 9.30pm & midnight. Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche Al-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 1.30pm, 3.30pm & 6.30pm. Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Mr Bean
MGM, Kolleyat Al-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Cairo Sheraton, Al-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight. El-Haram, Al-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Al-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Air Force 1
Renaissance, World Trade Centre, Corniche Al-Nil, Maspero. Tel 580 4039. Normandy, 31 Al-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Odeon I, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

Tomorrow Never Dies
Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
Pierce Brosnan stars as the new 007.

Anastasia
Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche Al-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
An animated feature film for the little ones.

Face/Off
Odeon III, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

Ressala Ila Al-Wali (Message to the Wali)
Odeon II, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm. Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Sphinx, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm.


Giuseppe Crisolini Malatesta

Tamanta wa Arbe'in Saa Fi Isra'il (48 Hours in Israel)
Diana, 17 Al-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 592 4727. Daily, 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
With Nadia El-Guindi and Farouq El-Fishawi, directed by Nader Galal.

Hysteria
Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 593 4284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Ahmed Zaki and Abla Kamel.

Ismailia Rayeh Gaey (Ismailia Back and Forth)
Rivoli II, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 8pm & 10pm. Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

DANCE

Don Quixote
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 339 8144. 18 March, 8pm. Until the end of the month.
The Bolshoi Theatre of Russia performs.

MUSIC

National Arabic Music Ensemble
Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 339 8132. 12 March, 8pm.
Conducted by Selim Sahab.

The Barber of Seville
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 339 8144. 12 & 13 March, 8pm.
The Rossini composition, performed by the Cairo Symphony Orchestra, with Alessio Vlad as director of the orchestra, Crisolini Malatesta as set designer, and Italian and Egyptian vocals including the Cairo Opera Choir.

Concert of the Talents Development Centre
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 13 March, 7pm.

Sharqiat Fathy Salama
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 14 March, 8pm.

Cairo Symphony Orchestra
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 14 March, 8pm.
Compositions by Ragueh Daoud, Tchemisov, Rachmaninov and Tchaikovsky, with soloists Ramzy Yassa (piano) and Sherif El-Razzaz (clarinet), conducted by Ahmad El-Saedi.

Gala Concert from Slovakia
Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya St, Abdin. Tel 391 9956. 15 March, 8pm.

Flute and Piano Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 15 March, 8pm.
With Inas Abdel-Daiem.

Yehia Gh[illegible]
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 16 March, 8pm.

Akhenaton Chamber Opera Company
Ewart Hall, Main Campus, AUC, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 6373. 18 March, 8pm.
The company will be performing excerpts from Bernstein's Trouble in Tahiti and other selections.

THEATRE

Famous for 15 Minutes New Plays Festival
Howard Theatre, Main Campus, AUC, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 354 2964. 12, 14 & 15 March, 8pm. (for more information, contact Tom Couch, tel: 355 8292).
Presentation of new plays written by AUC students in conjunction with new plays written by professional playwrights.

Spinning Lives
Al-Harrawi House, Mohamed Abdou St, behind Al-Azhar Mosque. Tel 510 4174. Until 17 March, 8pm.
Based on the epic of Al-Sira Al-Helaliya, performed by Al-Warsha Troupe, directed by Hassan El-Geretly.

Cent Mobiles A Part Un (A Hundred Mobiles Bar One)
Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya St, Abdin. Tel 391 9956. 17 March, 7pm, 18 March, 11am & 8pm.
Performed by the ALIS Company.

Al-Tayeb Wal-Sherrir (The Good and The Bad)
Al-Salam Theatre, Qasr Al-Aini St. Tel 355 2484. Daily, 10pm.
Yehia El-Fakharani, Sawsan Badr, Mohamed Metwalli and Sayed Azmi perform under the direction of Ahmed Abdel-Halim, in a play scripted by Alfred Farag with songs written by Gamal Bekhit.

Ballo (Fanfare)
Madinet Nasr Theatre, Nasr City. Tel 402 0804. Daily 9.30pm. Thur, 9.30pm.
With Salah El-Saadani, Samah Anwar, Mahmoud El-Guendi, Ashraf Abdel-Baqi, Hala Fakher, Hussein El-Imam, Hassan El-Asmar and Sommaya.

Allahom Ega'aloh Kheir (May All End Well)
Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya St, Abdin. Tel 390 7707. Daily 9.30pm.
Scripted by Lenin El-Ramly, with poetry by Sayed Hegab, the play is directed by Mohssen Helmy. With Ali El-Haggar, Rania Farid Shawqi, Ashraf Abdel-Ghafour, Abdel-Rahman Abu Zahra.

LECTURES

Between Globalisation and Heritage Preservation
Oriental Hall, Main Campus, AUC, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 574 6373. 16 March, 5pm.
Panel discussion featuring Mohamed Sid-Ahmed, political analyst and author, *Al-Ahram* newspaper, Mohamed Salmawy, editor-in-chief of Al-Ahram Hebdo, Hisham El-Sherif, AUC professor of Management and Tarek Hatem, AUC associate professor of Management.

Site Conservation in the Dakhleh Oasis
Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology in Cairo, 11 Mahalla St, Heliopolis. Tel 415 6278. 17 March, 6pm.
Lecture by Dr Anthony Mills, director of the Dakhleh Oasis Project.

My Experience With Poetry
Oriental Hall, Main Campus, AUC, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 574 6373. 17 March, 6pm.
Lecture by Sudanese poet Mohamed Al-Fitouri, who will also read a selection of his poetry.

Fabrizio Clerici, The Man and His Works
Centre of Art, 1 Al-Mashad Al-Swissri St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8211. 17 March, 7pm.
Lecture by Carmine Siniscalco; in conjunction with the exhibition at the Centre of Art, Zamalek.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.
Please send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo.
Tel 5786064.
Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by **Injy El-Kashef**

Around the galleries


Tapestry from Akhmim

THIRTY textile wall hangings by **Abdel-Aziz Gouda** are on show at the gallery attached to the **Faculty of Applied Arts**. Entire spools, bits of thread, left-over patches of cloth are deftly woven into a new coherent whole.

Akhmim is also back in town, always a good thing that. Thanks to the efforts of the **Association of Upper Egypt for Education and Development**, founded in 1942, the loveliest of Upper Egyptian needlework can come into being. Birds, trees, flowers, rivers and brightly clad lads and lasses have, for over half a century, continued to be stitched into delightfully cornucopian pastorals, never too cloying, never without breathing space, by the young ladies of Akhmim. Over 200 of these, together with woodwork by the young men of Hagaza village, are on exhibit at the Cairo premises of the Association.

Reviewed by **Nagwa El-Ashri**

In reason lies hope

The more ideology, the less interest there is in truth, Habermas seems to follow this guideline as an act of faith. **Ernest Wolf-Gazo** introduces the career and influence of Juergen Habermas, the celebrated philosopher who this week makes his first visit to Cairo



Jürgen Habermas will give two lectures at the American University in Cairo. The first, "Learning through disaster: reflections on the short 20th century," will be on Wednesday 18 March (19:00-21:00 hrs), at Jameel Auditorium. The second, "Theory and praxis revisited," will be on Thursday 19 March (15:00-17:00 hrs), at the Blue Room, Greek Campus.

We are pleased, of course, that Habermas has accepted the invitation to come to Cairo as a sign of respect, and in the hope that the light of reason will overshadow the clouds of the irrational and the ideological. Habermas provides us with a platform that is not ideological and always open towards reasonable discourse, among human beings, in terms of respect, sympathy and understanding. Habermas provides such a therapeutic theory, to be applied to the soul, which has been damaged in the process of modernisation.

In Habermas's theory of communicative rationality the basic presupposition is always that the human being must recognise itself as a human being and not a machine, an animal or an angel. In this, despite his critique of Aristotle's moral and political philosophy (in the form of neo-Aristotelianism), Habermas conforms to the Aristotelian definition of what it means to be human: animal rationale. It is the specific characteristic of being rational that makes the human being human in the first place.

That is the legacy of Greek philosophy, which Habermas shares with the classical ideal. The idea that classical rationality, expressed by Aristotle and Kant, must be subject-centered and unitary is discarded in Habermas's works. However, the fact that the Habermasian *Ansatz* decentres reason does not mean that reason and rationality is abandoned. Habermas is trying to reinforce rationality in terms of a newly structured communicative reasoning process, in which discourse and its participants take centre stage and not the lonely Cartesian mind trying to make sense, in winter, next to the fire.

The famous dictum, "I think, therefore I am," is recast into a diversity of opinion and judgments tested, in the long run, within the community of researchers. The Cartesian Ego is transformed into a community effort of trying to attempt to develop a rational foundation for a respective discourse which lends itself to function as an immunity system against the ideology so prevalent in our time. The more ideology, the less interest there is in truth. Habermas seems to follow this guideline as an act of faith. In this sense his work can be understood as a critique of post-modernity. His confrontation with the leading members of the postmodernist trend can be witnessed in his lectures published as *The Discourse on Modernity* in 1988.

There is no doubt that Habermas counts as one of the leading thinkers in the last quarter of the 20th century. Numerous works in philosophy and the social sciences contain references and footnotes decorated with the name of Habermas. It lends respectability, seriousness, comprehensiveness, and in-depth discussion of the respective themes or topics at hand. Works by Habermas have exerted a major influence on the literature of the social sciences and philosophy. The major works, so far, *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1968) and *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1981) have had a pervasive impact upon communication research programmes, language studies, sociological theory, social psychology, ethics, political theory and philosophy. The intellectual world, from Frankfurt to London and Paris, from New York to Berkeley, from Bombay to Tokyo, from Melbourne to Capetown, not to mention Turkey and Iran, has paid attention to the works of Habermas. Through respective translations and interpretations in local languages, rationality is reconstructed within the framework of modern conditions and possibilities. The substance remains, the form has changed, and along with it the language.

This has always been the problem of innovative thinkers: what to do with outmoded language and categories? This is true for Kant, true for Wittgenstein, true for Heidegger, and not least for Habermas. We have suspicions that the Habermasian project of reconstructing modernity, along the line of communicative rationality, is a more conservative approach than would be admitted by Habermas himself, let alone his followers. Yet it is a conservatism that tries to preserve the positive aspects of the classical ideals, and negates those elements of the classical world that have turned out to be damaging or, in the long run, inadequate for human beings. Perhaps it is too much to say that Habermas's conservatism, in comparison to some postmodernisms run wild, is a revolutionary conservatism. For, after all, what good is a theory if we have to murder or kill a single human being in order to prove it? The 20th century has seen enough examples of this sort and should have learned from these terrible mistakes. Habermas's project of universal communicative rationality is rationality with a human face, not merely painted, but substantial.

In the last quarter of our century Habermas has emerged as a leading thinker on social-philosophic-political issues, not only in his native Germany, but also on the world stage. His influence emerged, especially during the student revolt in the late 1960s and early 70s. His experience at the end of the Second World War, the radio broadcasts and cinema newsreels of the Nuremberg trials, had a lasting effect on Habermas's political formation and consciousness. His newspaper article against Heidegger in 1953, pointing out the contradiction between the philosopher's exclamations and political stance, was the first sign of the public Habermas who, ever since, has remained ready to engage in public debate on behalf of reason and the enlightenment of the public. By the early 1980s Habermas presented us with his notion of "communicative rationality". Let us traverse, for a moment, Habermas's curriculum vitae in order to clarify the developmental stages of a thinker of international significance.

Growing up in a bombed out and morally bankrupt Germany, Habermas and his generation had to reconstitute a moral life in the newly emerging Federal Republic. "Reeducation", sponsored by the Allied Forces, was the sign of the times. Habermas took it upon himself to "reeducate" his intellectual and moral character in order to come to terms with the Nazi catastrophe. Not only the Nazi past, but also what is known as classical modernism, e.g. the radio, the X-ray, the chemical industry, the Bauhaus, the theatre of Brecht, the expressionists, the "Blue Angel", Thomas Mann, Franz Kafka, the proletarian class struggle, Einstein, Planck, and Heisenberg — Weimar's cultural roots — were confronted by Habermas's generation in the 1950s. In the 1960s Habermas was an important mentor to intellectual leaders of the student revolt such as Rudi Dutschke and Daniel Cohn-Bendit, who confronted the bastions of middle-class propriety.

Although the heroes of the student revolutionaries were Mao, Marx, and Marcuse, not to forget the romantic Che, it was Habermas, the young professor of philosophy at Frankfurt University, who was ready to converse, in a constructive way, with the revolutionaries, not demonising them as their elders did. Habermas himself was the product of the classical German Humboldt University system that emphasised classical humanism, especially the *Geisteswissenschaften* (humanities). Classical Idealist German philosophy including Kant, Fichte, Hegel, and Schelling, as well as its Marxian heritage, had a lasting influence on the intellectual formation of Habermas. His doctoral dissertation on Schelling shows the influence of German idealistic thinking in his later works, including the influential *Knowledge and Human Interest*. In addition, the heritage of classical sociological literature, including Toennis, Durkheim, Karl Mannheim, and especially Max Weber, added to the multidimensional platform from which Habermas developed his project of "communicative rationality". Later, in the 1970s, Habermas reeducated himself again by coming to terms with the Anglo-American analytical philosophy and sociology of J.L. Austin, John Searle, George Herbert Mead and Talcott Parsons. And due to his close friendship since their student days in Bonn with Karl-Otto Apel, Habermas engaged in a dialogue with the American philosopher-scientist Charles S. Peirce.

The result was the communicative discourse on ethics. Of course, Marx looms large on the horizon of Habermas's work, but it should be clear by now that the Marxian mode of interpreting the world was transformed by the superb craftsmanship of Habermas's discursive thought.

Dogmatism and ideological game-playing is foreign to Habermas's mind-set. His experience of Nazi Germany lent him an immunity to easy combat, to dishonest and arbitrary ideological positions promoted for selfish reasons. Works such as Heidegger's *Being and Time*, Loewith's *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, Marx's early work, Husserl's phenomenology, and, of course, the founding members of the Frankfurt School — Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Walter Benjamin to name the most prominent — injected a dose of critical acumen into Habermas's formulation of communicative rationality as critical theory.

Habermas, after his doctorate at Bonn University in 1954, worked on the structures of public formation and acquired his habilitation (equivalent to tenure at a German University) with Walter Abendroth, an old fighter for social democracy, at Marburg University. During this period Habermas, along with Ralf Dahrendorf (later Director of the London School of Economics), was assistant to Adorno at the Frankfurt School of Social Research. Thus Habermas became identified, for some time to come, as the brilliant new star of the new generation of the Frankfurt School.

Of course, in time it became obvious that Habermas was his own man, despite his indebtedness to Horkheimer and Adorno. In the early 1960s the doyen of German philosophers, Hans-Georg Gadamer, mediated a professorship at Heidelberg University so that, between 1961 to 1964, Habermas was a colleague of Loewith and Gadamer.

Soon he moved to a full professorship of philosophy and sociology, succeeding Horkheimer at Frankfurt University until 1971. After 1971 Habermas accepted the co-directorship, with the physicist Friedrich von Weizsaecker, of the newly founded Max Planck Institute for the Research of the Scientific-Technological World. This was a fruitful period which saw the development of the intellectual modes of syntheses, so characteristic of middle Habermas, and which reached fruition in 1981 with the publication of *The Theory of Communicative Action*.

Politics, in the person of Bavarian Governor Franz Josef Strauss, intervened and the Max Planck Institute in Starnberg was closed down. Habermas, due to the efforts of his colleague and friend Karl-Otto Apel and many admirers, including Horkheimer's pupil Alfred Schmidt, returned to Frankfurt, this time as professor of sociology and philosophy, where he remained until his retirement in 1994.

In the meantime Habermas has received honours from across the globe. And his acceptance of the invitation to visit Egypt for the first time will no doubt reinforce his influence on a younger generation of critical intellectuals in the Islamic world, from Cairo to Istanbul, from Baghdad to Tehran, not to mention the Mahgreb and the Indonesian-Malay world, which has already born fruit in several dissertations and publications enriching the discourse between Islam and the West.

In conclusion we may elaborate, in a nutshell, the centrepiece of Habermas's philosophic efforts, namely that of Theory and Praxis. This has been the underlying concern of the Habermasian quest for a communicative rationality. The Theory and Praxis problem appeared in the debate between Plato and his pupil Aristotle. How can theory be made or transformed into reality? How are ideas related to the empirical world? These are perennial problems of philosophy. In modern times it was Hegel and Marx that sharpened the eyes of the Western world to this specific problem. The revolutions — scientific, social, political and economic — made it clear to the young left Hegelians, foremost among them Ludwig Feuerbach and the young Marx, that all was not well with the middle-class Christian world order. We know the story. Marx's problem of how to turn philosophy into action, ie how to make philosophy practical, was the focus of much debate in early 19th century Europe. The scandals that ensued due to these debates are well known. But the problem ran deeper: since the 16th century Europe had found itself in a process of bifurcation, whereby morality and politics in Machiavelli and Hobbes had been divorced. Mechanical explanations for the universe did not suffice to explain the turmoil caused by the Thirty Years War (religious confrontation between Catholics and Protestants) and the scientific revolution.

The French Revolution reinforced this bifurcation of nature and man, state and society, religion and science. The peasants turned into citizens and the royal courts turned into public forums. New categories of understanding were necessary in order to make sense of this new world order, the Newtonian-mechanistic universe. The old order of the Christian-Aristotelian teleological universe no longer satisfied the European mind as it moved into a critical stage of self-reflection and doubt, one of the essential elements of the modern European mind.

In the works of Habermas this process of self-reflection is exhibited in an analytic and dialectic mode of discourse that provides a paradigm of critical thinking beneficial to anyone who claims to posses rationality.

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Plain Talk

I am always happy to see new ventures undertaken by women. Much as I am against dividing society in terms of male and female, it is still heartening to see what I look upon as a revival of an almost moribund feminist movement.

I remember how in 1991 Dr Hoda El-Sadda, together with novelist Salwa Bakr, began publishing *Hager*, a series of books dealing with issues relating to women. The latest addition is an elegant publication entitled *Memory's Messages*, published by Women and Memory Forum which also has Dr El-Sadda as one of its founding members. This new publication aims at rereading Arab cultural history in terms of contemporary women's issues.

What is interesting is that most of the founding members are teachers of literature, English in particular, all with PhD degrees, and not sociologists or psychologists. Their objective is "to re-establish the balance of the communal memory which has been distorted by the process of distancing (women)." Women, El-Sadda believes, do not figure in recorded official history. Their role has been marginalised or belittled which has resulted in "the distortion of history, hence of the communal memory."

The rationale for rereading history is essentially politically motivated, expressing a particular stand towards life and a desire to partake positively in cultural and social realities. This, with the aim of affecting a change toward a more just and balanced stance towards history for all members of society.

According to the article, the main objectives of this Forum are the publication of a year book that would include specialised studies in Arab cultural history from a perspective which takes into consideration the cultural and social situation of the two sexes; the collection and documentation of the biographies of Egyptian women who took part in public life at the beginning of the century, and especially those who played a role in the development of the feminist movement; the rewriting of some Egyptian folk tales from a feminist perspective; the preparation of a bulletin that would aim at strengthening relations among researchers in the field of Arab cultural history; and, finally, the establishment of a library specialised in historical studies.

All these future activities would be channelled to produce cultural material that would succeed in "shaking some of the current concepts about the roles of women and their relation to culture, with the final objective of supplying all effective cultural tools necessary for the removal of obstacles that stand in the way of women's renaissance."

I am sure there will be a great number of men, myself included, who would not only support these aims, but also would participate in the process of their implementation. But, as I read through the statement of objectives, I stopped at the one about rewriting folk tales, and, before making up my mind about how I felt about this objective, I discovered in the magazine issue a concrete example of this endeavour. "The Tale of Shehreyar and his Brother" is here retold with a new narrative twist, a tale untold before. Anyone who wants to know what happens in this fantastic tale had better refer to the magazine.

True to their manifesto, we find in the magazine a biography of Malak Hefny Nassef (1886-1918). She was the first Egyptian girl ever to receive an academic degree from a government school (1900), the first Egyptian woman to submit a number of demands to the Egyptian parliament (1910), the first to lay the foundations of the feminist movement in Egypt, and the first to have a poem published, and this she did at the age of 13, in an official magazine. And yet, in spite of her distinctive role in the early 20th century Egyptian Enlightenment movement, this role is totally overlooked in official Egyptian history.

On 17 October of this year, the Forum will be celebrating Nassef's memory. The Forum is currently asking researchers to submit papers dealing with different topics relating to this great woman and her contribution not only to the feminist movement, but also to the broader Egyptian reality.

Mursi Saad El-Din

Art

Tentative boundaries

Nigel Ryan witnesses an unusual embalming in the work of Rehab El-Sadek



In the corner of the Mashrabiya Gallery sits a pile of old school books, their pages stained with age, the names of previous owners inscribed in faded ink, in perfect copper plate script, on covers. Indeed, the same books, or parts of them, reappear throughout the gallery, pages framed, concealed, inverted, overlain.

Some books are no more than blocks of wood on which covers have been attached. No difference, though, for none of these books open, since even those volumes that have not been dismembered have had their pages glued together. The words have congealed into a brick, something dense, heavy and unreadable.

As if to emphasis this point, several texts, in addition to being glued shut, are also tightly bound with twisted pieces of wire. *XVIII^E Révolution Empire* is wrapped around with wire, twisted into impossible knots. This history is fixed, closed, beyond revision, even as it has been rendered unreadable.

Everything here is muted. Linen is aged, stained. Paper is brown, stained. Yet Rehab El-Sadek's show animates this sepia, imbuing the prescribed colour of nostalgia with some still shocking truths. Knowledge becomes an object, one that could well inflict damage.

She archaeologises the known, while at the same time delineating the tentative nature of the boundaries of what can be known. The objects included take on an ethnographic hue: care has been taken to age everything included that was not old to begin with. And even the gallery has been subjected to this process. Water pipes are wrapped with linen bandages, carefully combed in places to emphasise the disintegrating threads. On everything appear bits of text, drawn mostly from the Book of the Dead and transliterated into an elegant Arabic script.

It is a very gentle embalming, meticulously done. Roughly made wooden desks and benches receive the same treatment as the pipes, though here the overlaid script combines suggestions of graffiti with learning by rote. But what — the question hovers everywhere in the gallery — is it to know, what can be known?

The walls contain a number of framed collages, often including pages from the dismembered books, in addition to scraps of fabric, weft and warp in places separated, occasional sheets of graph paper, empty of coordinates but insistent on the vacuous rigidity of their grids. Maps are drawn, the Nile picked out in black threads, but always the boundaries disintegrate, are concealed. This sketchy topography peters out, just like the threads, strands of the known, the man made, the civilised, combed out to dangle over the edge of the unknown.

Some of the torn pages are in themselves amusing. They are objects thrown up from a past that, if often considered more innocent — here again the sepia tints of nostalgia — remains as cruel as ever. In one frame is a page torn from a novel, *Meringues*, the kind of polite pot-boiler produced for mass consumption in Edwardian England.

"'Aren't you ashamed of yourself?' asked my hostess, when she found me in the supper room after all the guests had gone."

So begins *Meringues*. Unfortunately, the opening paragraph is all you will get. This is only one page, and even here the rest of the text is obscured beneath ethnographic bric-a-brac and another map, again of Egypt, the colonisation of which becomes the flip-side of such English politesse.

If there is something of the tomb about this exhibition it is far from marmoreal. Quiet, yes, but the very nature of the materials used prohibits such associations. It is rather like viewing fragments of Coptic textiles: the wonder is that anything so eminently biodegradable should have survived at all. And so to all those bandages, around pipes, around the skirting board, pinned onto the edge of cupboards. Nothing is so fragile, so given to corruption, so able to disintegrate as the human body, as those embalmers par excellent, the ancients, knew well.

Rehab El-Sadek dresses this exhibition beautifully. Mysterious, elegiac, lyrical: the registers employed may not be extensive, but goodness, they carry a lot.

For full details, see Listings opposite

Personal battles

Interminable divorce cases, courtroom struggles to reclaim children or alimony, humiliation and destitution: the horror stories are numerous — and harrowing. This week, **Fayza Hassan** heard yet more such stories, but also glimpsed the possibility of new hope at the seminar convened by the National Research Centre for Social and Criminological Research to discuss amendments to the Personal Status Law, currently before the People's Assembly



From *An Egyptian Panorama*, edited by Nicholas Warner

"They asked Goha what he thought about marriage," laughs Zeinab Radwan, professor of Islamic philosophy and dean of Dar Al-Ulum at Cairo University's Fayoum branch. "Goha said: 'I blame those who married before me and didn't tell me, and those who married after me and didn't ask'."

Today, many women in Egypt, whose divorce cases, dragging on in one court after another, have sapped their energy and resources, will smile in wry recognition at this bit of popular wisdom. They are finding that the current Personal Status Law is loaded against them and that, under its authority, they are more likely than not to lose if their marriage ends. Says Radwan: "Women who seek divorce from the courts are faced with proceedings which can last a lifetime. They begin litigation as young women. By the time they are granted their divorce, some 15 years later, their chances for a second marriage are next to nil. In many cases, they also end up destitute. Furthermore, the conditions for the custody of minors under the present law are more likely than not to damage their children permanently."

Experts have been sounding the alarm: it is not only women who are at risk under the present legal system: the rise in psychological and mental problems among the young, the increase in the rate of juvenile crimes, drug addiction and prostitution are unmistakable indications that the fabric of the family as we know it is stretched to the point of disintegration.

In an unprecedented move, the ministries of justice and social affairs, the office of the prosecutor-general and the religious authorities of Al-Azhar have joined forces in a forum organised by the National Centre for Social and Criminological Research under the auspices of Minister of Social Affairs Mervat Tellawi. Their aim is to prepare and present a project for the amendment of the Personal Status Law. If participants have it their way, the recommendations issued by the conference, and which have been presented to the People's Assembly and the cabinet, will give Egyptian women a better chance in claiming court protection in matters of divorce, reconciliation, custody, alimony, visitation rights, the right to the marital abode, the right of children from a non-Egyptian father to their mother's nationality, the right of wives to travel without their husbands' written consent and the drafting of the marriage contract.

The round-table discussion, organised and hosted by the research centre, and headed by its director, Soheir Lutfi, was attended by Sheikh Fawzi Zefzaf, deputising for the Sheikh of Al-Azhar; representatives from the ministries of justice, social affairs, and the interior; the office of the prosecutor-general; lawyers; social scientists; and the Egyptian ambassador for human rights at the UN, as well as a number of interested experts. The proceedings fully mirrored the hopes of all those working toward a material change in the condition of women who have been dragged through the courts for years, seeking— and being denied— redress in family matters.

Sheikh Fawzi Zefzaf opened the discussion, pointing out that the *Shari'a* gives women full rights. The mistakes, he emphasised, were to be found in the implementation of the law, not its essence.

Lawyer Tahani Rashed argued that it has always been difficult to amend the Personal Status Law in Egypt because many legal authorities consider criticism a slight against the *Shari'a* and Islam. This is why, according to Rashed, specific articles are sometimes addressed, but the law as a whole has not been changed. It is important to realise that other Muslim countries do not abide by the same personal status law and that there is nothing sacred about it, she emphasised. Furthermore, though based on the *Shari'a*, "it has been twisted and abused by the courts to favour a number of prejudices which were never enshrined in the Qur'an."

Concurring, lawyer Nazli El-Sherbini added that she considered the treatment meted out by the courts "sheer violence against women".

Among the most bitter grievances, the victims themselves expressed the resentment at the conditions of the *rag'a* (the right of the man to take back his wife after he has divorced her). Under present conditions, taking back one's divorced wife does not require a document stating that the marriage has been resumed. Consequently, the husband is free to stand by the terms of the original divorce. Many of the participants demanded that a new marriage contract be drawn up and registered in these cases, spelling out the woman's resumed — or new — rights and duties.

The necessity for irrefutable proof of psychological violence is also a thorn in the side of many women seeking divorce. How, demanded lawyer Amira Baheieddin, can a woman prove satisfactorily that she has been psychologically harmed by her husband taking a second wife? Dislike, incompatibility or unhappiness cannot be materially proven, yet no one can deny their existence. Furthermore, asserted Baheieddin, the courts are often socially biased regarding physical violence and often send poor women on their way when they complain about a beating, but are more amenable to granting an educated woman a divorce for the same cause.

Visitation rights also leave mothers at the mercy of the court, which decides at its discretion and forces the parent who has been denied custody to see the child or children during scheduled encounters in a supervised place. This artificial form of contact completely disrupts the parent/child relationship.

At present, women must also have the authorisation of their husband (or closest male kin) to own and use a passport for travel. Women who work are often prevented from going on business trips at a whim of their husbands, who have only to inform the relevant authorities that they are withdrawing permission. Many women have had their passport withdrawn simply because they have displeased their husbands in a minor matter.

More immediate issues, such as the conditions of alimony, and more specifically the many legal loopholes allowing a divorced man to default on his payments, were discussed at length. Mamdouh Said, deputy president of the Court of Appeals, commented that a husband who has been supporting his family normally for years is allowed to suddenly claim lack of resources if he decides he is no longer happy with his wife. It was suggested that one immediate remedy could be the establishment of an insurance fund, formed by charging a tax on each marriage contract, which will provide the divorced woman with cash to cover her family's immediate expenses.

Recommendations presented to the People's Assembly and the Cabinet

Custody: a reassessment of the conditions of custody or the request that the judge disregards them if and when they do not serve the interests of the children.

Visitation: Current visitation conditions psychologically injure the whole family. Both parents must enjoy unhampered access to the children. Visitation rights should not be restricted to the parents, but should be extended to all members of the families. The task of regulating visitation rights should fall under the jurisdiction of the prosecutor-general and not decided through the courts.

Permission to travel: Judges will be empowered to grant married women the right to travel with or without their children.

Marriage contract: The contract must include all the conditions which the two spouses deem necessary to preserve their respective rights and which will be binding on both parties.

Reconciliation procedures: The judiciary should play a more active role in trying to reconcile the spouses whenever possible.

***Al-Rag'a*:** A new document should be drafted to prove that the husband has remarried his wife in accordance with the prescribed rules and after the stipulated delay, and to state the resumption of her matrimonial rights.

Alimony: It is proposed that a new legal process be established in order to evaluate correctly the real financial means of the husband or the relative responsible for the payment of alimony (his father or brother). Furthermore, provisions for dependants should be made to allow them to receive alimony payments from a government body as soon as the divorce is finalised. If and when necessary, the amounts could be recouped from the estranged husband at a later stage by the relevant authorities.

***Urfi* (contractual or common-law) marriage:** A legal process should control this type of marriage which deprives the children issued from it of inheriting from their father. Special legislation should be promulgated regarding Egyptian women who marry foreigners and an immediate solution should be brought to the problem of children whose father is of a different nationality.

***Khul'* (divorce at the insistance of the wife, who must pay compensation):** In this form of divorce, the wife should not have to cite reasons beyond incompatibility.

Financial guardianship: It is suggested that wide powers be granted to the office of the prosecutor-general, in order to protect the interests of those under legal tutelage, and that legal proceedings be simplified to the utmost.

Role of the media: the media should spread awareness of personal status matters, correctly and without bias.

General recommendation: Provision should be made for matters relating to personal status to be separated from court litigation and placed under the jurisdiction of a specialised judge.



Your majesty

My grandmother was a monarchist. She was born that way, exactly as others are born believers. Throughout her life, her political convictions never wavered, although her reasons were, I suspect, solely of an aesthetic nature. She felt a deep need for, and took great pleasure in, the rituals of protocol, the pomp and circumstance. A royal ball or procession were something to behold. Without them, the world would have been an uglier place, she firmly believed.

She grew up in an environment inhabited by the powerful and the mighty, and emerged convinced that they stood, by divine ordainment, several notches above the common mortals. My grandmother's conversation often sounded like a history book, albeit a slightly elitist tome. She was familiar with the most intricate mysteries of royal genealogies and knew the sizes of all the lesser palaces.

Although she considered France the birthplace of illustrious breeding, she never forgave the French people their revolution, nor the brutal slicing of their monarchs' gracious crowned heads. She often expressed the opinion that what had followed this heinous act was ample proof that the people never were meant to govern.

Another shameful chapter of French history, according to her, was enshrined in the regrettable episode during which a young upstart, aping his kingly predecessors, attempted to masquerade as an emperor. She was convinced that his vulgar mimicry had been instrumental in bringing about his well deserved fate. It was, she said, as if Louis XIV had been replaced on the throne by his valet for a while.

During her lifetime, she witnessed the tumbling of many of her idols and followed them mentally into exile — or worse. She ascribed their downfall to the ignorance and jealously of the people they had ruled, and always predicted that democracy would only bring colossal hardships to those responsible for what she viewed as crimes of lèse-majesté, the sins of the perpetrators visited upon their descendants for ever and ever.

My grandmother was extremely protective of the few remaining royal families around the world, scanning their authorised biographies and the social pages of the international press to keep abreast of their news. She allowed them their antics, provided they were either totally secret, or so formidably scandalous as to command respect and admiration. The Duke of Windsor's abdication was a case in point, though she did not credit him for discernment or good taste in women. She never stopped commending his honesty, dignity and fortitude in exile, however. She staunchly ignored any suggestion that he may not have been all she imagined him to be. Understandably, she had few words of praise for Wallis, "an adventuress", whom she suspected of having coveted the throne regardless of explicit utterances to the contrary. My grandmother understood the bewitching attraction of power and never believed that the American divorcée had been immune to its charms.

Mrs Simpson may well have been at the root of my grandmother's aversion for things American, although in the '50s she mentioned Elsa Maxwell, the famous society writer, as the quintessence of what she hated most in that country. She accused Maxwell of prying shamelessly on the rich and the famous, taking advantage of their natural generosity and then bad-mouthing them publicly. What else could be expected from someone of such lowly birth? she would sigh, when confronted with items relating the presence of the "greatest gossiper in the world" at some princely function. "It serves them right for letting her near them," she would mutter. She was revolted by French couturier Jean Dessès when she read in Maxwell's memoirs that he had offered to provide "that horrid woman" with dresses for free as a publicity stunt. Dessès, my grandmother predicted, was finished. As for Maxwell, to have made a profession out of the dissemination of aristocratic rumours, an unspeakably vulgar endeavour, made her worthy only of the deepest contempt.

My grandmother did not often air her deepest thoughts about God-ordained social differences and the necessity to be ruled over by a hereditary monarch, especially not around my father, or the children, when we began to grow up; but I always knew exactly what she thought, just from watching her study the morning papers.

She died not long after President Kennedy was shot, a tragedy that fully confirmed her opinion of rulers who acted without the benefit of divine privilege, though she did not live long enough to hear the rumours of his alleged affairs and, far worse, his Mafia connections.

I very often wonder what my grandmother would think of the world today, and how horrified she would be watching talk shows on TV. Nowadays, the few crowned heads remaining don't usually cut the formidable figure she always expected of them; their role is either highly forgettable, or, in the rare instances when they choose to remind the public of their existence, quite questionable. I am sure she would have frowned violently at Diana and Dodi's escapades and the distasteful publicity which plagued them in life and death. More than anything, however, I am overwhelmed with mirth at the thought of my grandmother's incredulous reaction, had she lived long enough to watch the president of the United States squirming live in front of the television cameras, while providing a scandalised, titillated public with embarrassing details of his most private habits — habits which, by all standards, should have remained untold.

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

Green *khubbeza*

Ingredients:
1 kg fresh green *khubbeza*
1 bunch fresh green chard
1 bunch fresh green coriander leaves
5 to 6 cups chicken stock
1 tbsp. crushed garlic
2 tbsp. butter
Salt

Method:
Wash the *khubbeza* leaves well and pluck them off their stems. Wash the chard and pluck the leaves, leaving off the hard parts of the stems. Wash the coriander leaves. Mix all three together and put them in a cooking pan with one cup only of water. Bring them to a boil. Cover and leave to boil until they reduce and release all their water residue. Strain the vegetables. Blend them in an electric mixer with some chicken stock. Bring the stock to a boil. Bring the blend back to the pan and add the boiling stock, stirring it into the green blend until you obtain a medium-thick consistency, more or less like that of *molokhiya*. Leave to boil until you are through with the next step. In a small saucepan, melt the butter. Add the garlic. Stir-fry it until yellowish in colour. Add it to the *khubbeza*. Remove from heat and cover. Leave for a few minutes then serve with rice and fried poultry.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Dinner out

Andrew Steele gets horticultural

Although Heliopolis has a reasonable choice of five-star hotel and fast food venues, the independent restaurant business is hardly booming. Perhaps this is why the Chantilly has become something of an institution. Indeed, if one lives in Heliopolis, it is somewhat of a challenge to prevent oneself from becoming a regular. So what is there to recommend it? The food, certainly, but let us not forget the environs. Situated slap and in fact bang in the middle of a Korba which is currently having its face lifted, it is certainly central, but more to the point it has a rather wonderful garden. Out the back door and down the garden path to the tables for dinner, located at the rear end of the space just next to the bar. Should you require less substantial fare, you may well be shunted into the coffee and cake area, endlessly peopled by bright young things who trill *mish-maaoul* and infinitum in squeaky voices.

Myself and my companion, being of hearty appetite and looking like serious diners, were ushered to the white tableclothed area and supplied with menus. Drinks were ordered and came in a jiffy. The victals on offer are nothing stunning, there is a selection of fairly run-of-the-mill meat, fish and poultry dishes, along with soups, salads and a selection of hors d'ouevres. However, the food is always of a certain standard, and that standard is always pleasingly high. We began with hearty soups. A thick, creamy, bursting with taste tomato for me, a thin, rather oily, onion for Mohamed. These came accompanied with Chantilly's home-made bread rolls. These are always delicious and tonight's selection had a very good nut and seed version which we gobbled up with some aplomb.

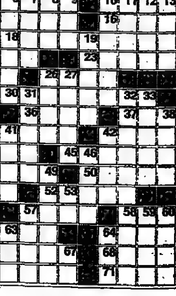
Mohamed is a vegetarian, and, not finding a suitable dish on the bill of fare, he decided to grill a waiter (metaphorically speaking of course) as to what the chef could rustle up. Expecting the usual option of replacing the meat in a meat dish with a mound of rice, he was pleasantly surprised, nay, shocked, to be offered a Spaghetti Alexandria, which sounded full of vegetable promise. And a tasty plate it turned out to be: al dente pasta with garlic, black olives and mushrooms, liberally strewn with a fresh and piquant tomato sauce. My *Paillard de Beouf Maitre d'Hotel* was a piece of meat that had been beaten to within an inch of its existence and grilled (not metaphorically speaking this time) to perfection. Huge dollops of rosemary butter perked the thing up no end, and it came with suitably yummy roesti potatoes and vegetables tossed in butter. Service was impeccable and the bill, coming in at LE90 for dinner for two with two Stellas was not too harsh on the wallet. But the garden, the garden was the star of tonight's dalliance, green and airy and flawlessly lit, it could almost turn one to horticulture. A question of the venue being everything, methinks.

Chantilly, Baghdad Street, Korba, Heliopolis
Tel: 4154728

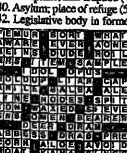
Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

By Samia Abdennour



ACROSS
1. Storey; stratum (4)
5. On the same footing (5)
10. Bring to a halt; cull (4)
14. Previously (4)
15. Auk (5)
16. Brood of pheasants (4)
17. Whit (4)
18. A place diametrically opposite (9)
20. Dress up (3)
21. Semi-colloidal suspensions (4)
23. Hippodrome (5)
24. Building for musical performances (5)
26. French soft cheese (4)
28. A condiment (5)
30. Sizzle; breathe fire (8)
34. Ascends (5)
36. Miss McGraw et al (4)
37. Small residue; gist of matter (3)
39. Precipitate; skin eruption (4)
40. Asylum; place of refuge (5)
42. Legislative body in former USSR (4)
43. French summer (3)
44. New name of French Sudan (4)
45. Pollen-bearing organ of flowering plant (6)
47. Without a border; blunt (8)
50. Premonitions (5)
51. God of War (4)
52. Circus worker (5)
54. Humorous (5)
57. Side post of window or doorway (4)
58. Lincoln's pet name (3)
61. Undesignated (9)
64. Large-headed nail; breeding place for horse (4)
65. Narrow channel between islands (4)
66. Device for drawing prize winning numbers of Premium bonds (4)
68. A drove (4)
69. Marked wrong, sl. (4)
70. Silly persons (5)
71. Perceive (4)



Last week's solution

DOWN
1. A tailless amphibian (4)
2. Prep. of location (4)
3. Saved for a rainy day (9)
4. Ionising radiation dosage (3)
5. Printing measure (2)
6. Pangs of conscience (6)
7. Vases (4)
8. Dexterity (3)
9. Garlands (3)
10. Snorted while dozing (6)
11. Neap; inflow (4)
12. Paradise (4)
13. Tableland (4)
19. Buckets (5)
21. Basic physical unit of heredity (4)
22. French for US (2)
25. Paten; shovel (4)
26. Trunk of tree (4)
27. Wreckage; detritus (5)
28. Caution; safekeeping (4)
29. Uric acid (5)
31. A song thrush (5)
32. Counts (10)
33. Ruminants' stomach where food is partly digested by bacteria (5)
35. Stratified mud rock (5)
38. Prevents (4)
41. Beer and lager (4)
42. Title of respect (4)
44. Clemency; kindness (5)
46. Mastaba (9)
48. Won (6)
49. A state of equilibrium (6)
53. Symbol for "americium" (2)
54. Torte; solidify; block (4)
55. Semi-precious type of agate (4)
56. Type of skin blemish (4)
57. Beginning of summer (4)
59. Belch (4)
60. Whirlpool (4)
62. Short for Margaret (3)
63. Scandinavian monetary unit (3)
64. Pronoun (5)
67. Initials found on some invoices (2)

In the sequel to an in-depth discussion of environmental issues, *Al-Ahram Weekly* highlights some of the hottest spots on the battlefield. Will the Environment Law help put out the flames?

Chains of molten lead

Studies recently carried out by Cairo University suggest that lead pollution has contributed to an increase in the number of mentally retarded children in Egypt, to a rate of 27 per thousand school-age children. **Mahmoud Bakr** reviews the aspects of this grave problem, and the means to limit and control it

According to Samia Galal, professor of ecology at the Higher Institute for Public Health, high concentrations of insecticides, chemicals and fertilisers in the soil leads to the increase of nitrate concentration which seeps into groundwater and pollutes it. Water used for drinking, cooking and other purposes by large sectors of the population is thus polluted, directly affecting human health, especially that of infants and young children. Studies have shown that high levels of nitrate in the bloodstream cause blue-baby syndrome, which sometimes results in death.

The Ministry of Public Health recently demanded the lowering of nitrate concentration in water to below accepted world standards, set at 10 microgrammes/decilitres, in order to protect mothers who work in agriculture and are exposed to insecticides. When their bodies absorb these poisonous nitrates, they transmit them to their breast-fed babies, thus causing anorexia as well as impaired eyesight and diminished hair growth. Children's ability to learn and assimilate is also negatively affected. Polluted air, dust, insufficient illumination and high levels of noise, etc, in school and at home are additional causes of underdevelopment. It is, therefore, necessary to improve environmental awareness in the home and at school, particularly with respect to women who are raising children. The government is currently organising a programme for the eradication of environmental illiteracy at all levels of society.

Dr Mohamed Islam, professor of conventional medicine at the University of Nottingham, conducted studies in Pakistan on a group of children who were blinded due to the higher-than-normal proportion of lead in the kohl traditionally applied to children's eyes. He found that the children rubbed the kohl off their eyes then put their fingers in their mouths, thus transferring the lead to their stomachs. A study on 24 children with kohl on their eyelids showed that the level of lead concentration in their blood reached dangerously high levels of 11.4 microgrammes/decilitres. A control group of children not using kohl showed rates of 4.3 microgrammes/decilitres. Tarek Geneina, director of the technical cooperation office at the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Authority, notes that, although an internationally accepted definition of what constitutes safe levels of lead in children's blood has not been devised, research has shown that concentrations of 10 microgrammes/decilitres are connected with retardation in the learning process and lowered intelligence levels.

Abdel-Rahman Tawfiq, human resources development expert, mentions a host of other factors which have a particularly harmful effect on children: noise pollution, the lack of an aesthetic environment, and the absence of greenery can all affect children negatively. "Stuffing children's heads with information and allowing them to play sports are not the only criteria of proper education," he notes. "It is of paramount importance to nurture and develop their aesthetic sense and optimistic perceptions of the future. Eliminating detrimental factors will help children think and contemplate their surroundings. This will boost their capacity to develop keen and independent powers of observation."

Abdel-Meguid Ismail Ramzi, assistant professor of gynaecology at Cairo University's Faculty of Medicine, adds that expectant mothers and their babies are more susceptible to injuries caused by lead than other women. Lead is absorbed in the body and deposited in the bones and teeth, and is hard to get rid of. Pregnant women's bodies require larger numbers of blood cells to provide the necessary nourishment for their growing foetuses. In the process of calcium and iron absorption by internal organs, lead is also assimilated, and nearly 85 per cent of the lead in the mother's blood will be retained by the placenta. This affects the nervous system, which begins to be formed during the early months of pregnancy. In some cases, the pregnant woman may suffer great pain due to lead absorption, which may cause her to abort, or lead to deficiency in foetal growth or premature delivery.

While prevention is no doubt the best medicine, some curative measures are being taken at the government level. Several ministries have signed an agreement to cooperate in implementing a national plan aimed at combating exposure to lead pollution. The plan was drawn up in cooperation with the ministries of health, housing, environment, petroleum and education, and deals with the various aspects of lead contamination.

Preparations for implementation have been underway since 1995. A comprehensive survey of different environmental samples was carried out in Cairo to assess the extent of children's exposure to lead. Results showed that certain foods, the application of kohl on the eyelids, and the use of lead-glazed pottery for cooking are among the principal sources of such exposure. Nearly 64 per cent of children up to six years of age showed rates of lead concentration above 10 microgrammes/decilitres, and that in some 14 per cent of the boys in the sample, the rate was higher than 20 microgrammes/decilitres.

The Ministry of Health is now carrying out a study to determine the distribution pattern of lead concentration rates in the blood of Cairene children. The aim is to define possible dangers stemming from high concentrations of lead in the bloodstream. The government has been aware of this problem since the early nineties, and has taken important steps in dealing with it. A plan was laid down by the Ministry of the Environment to regulate the operation of lead foundries. In parallel, the Ministry of Petroleum undertook to limit radically the use of leaded fuel, and succeeded in reducing the lead escaping from car engine exhausts by 50 per cent during the first three years of the programme. In addition, the Ministry of Health, together with the Ministry of Supply, have been investigating the sources of contamination of flour, and possible procedures for minimising this problem. The Ministry of Health is also attempting to reduce the consumption of canned food in containers welded with lead.

Tarek Geneina emphasises that three main objectives must be achieved in the coming five to seven years: updating operation methods in the large lead foundries; providing technical assistance to licensed cooperative foundries of small and medium size; setting up and implementing a comprehensive, long-term solution to overcome lead contamination throughout the country.

Not white for long: pollution can be kept out of sight, but its impact cannot be ignored *photo: Mohamed Lutfi*

Praising success, understanding failure

LAST WEEK, the Arab Bureau for Youth and Environment (ABYE) organised its second annual celebration of National Environment Day under the auspices of Nadia Makram Ebeid, minister of state for environmental affairs, in association with the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency. A thousand students came to the covered hall of the Cairo Stadium to take part. **Mahmoud Bakr** and **Sherine Nasr** attended.

Emad Adli, director of the ABYE, said the Bureau wished to mark the passing of three years since Law 4/1994, known as the Environment Law, came into force. The ABYE organised the first annual celebration of National Environment Day last year.

This year's celebrations coincided with the end of the grace period stipulated by the Environment Law. Organised with the cooperation of the United Nations Development Project, the celebration was held to support national and regional development activities, help spread environmental awareness, and increase awareness of the need to preserve and protect the environment — all crucial for the achievement of sustained development.

Industrial establishments which succeeded in applying environmentally-friendly policies were honoured, as were individuals who made outstanding contributions to environmental preservation. The justifications cited by those establishments which failed to improve their environmental record were also reviewed.

Makram Ebeid emphasised that environmental issues can no longer be considered a luxury. "We have set our priorities. Our task will only be accomplished through the help of young people," she noted. Abdel-Fattah El-Qassas, renowned ecologist, condemned the uncontrolled depletion of Egypt's national resources. "Protecting the environment is an ethical issue. Managing these resources in a sustainable manner is a moral obligation," he said.

Another Helwan?

Activists are fighting to prevent an environmental catastrophe from hitting Beni Suef, with five new cement factories set to open in close proximity to population centres. **Mariz Tadros** takes a deep breath

While the people of Helwan celebrated the recent decision to relocate the factories that have for so long polluted their lives, the people of Beni Suef are lamenting the growing concentration of cement factories in their governorate. Beni Suef is renowned for its natural abundance of clay, turning it into a haven for cement industries. For many inhabitants, however, the prospect of having five new cement factories all situated on the east bank of the Nile, in close proximity to humans, land and each other, is rather alarming. Three of the factories are supposed to be built in the Kremat area, another on Geziret Abu Saleh and another one in Beba.

Although the Beni Suef authorities are coming under fire for their failure to demand a relocation of these factories, officials have been reluctant to take active measures. The present governor of Beni Suef said it was the former governor, Sabri El-Qadi, who granted permission for these factories to be built. And since two of the factories are already putting in the infrastructure, they cannot simply be moved. Salah El-Zo'eri, head of the Beni Suef District Council, insists that it is not up to the district or the governorate to step in; the Ministry of Environment must assess whether these factories will cause harm or not. In light of the governorate's experience with existing cement factories and their impact on the environment, does he not perceive of a danger himself? "Of course there is a danger; we would rather these factories be situated in the desert, but if that is not possible, we are content with their chosen locations." There are villages in the environs, he admits, but "the investors have brought in experts who have convinced us that because these factories will be using the most sophisticated technology, there will be minimal harm."

El-Zo'eri dismisses the likelihood that such a heavy concentration of cement factories will transform Beni Suef into another Helwan. "In Helwan they didn't have proper filters or the latest technology to prevent pollution, but with these new cement factories, the investors promised that pollution would not exceed 50 mg per square metre, which is considered safe," he explains.

At a District Council meeting held last month to discuss the environmental impact of these five new cement factories, recommendations did not touch on the possibility of their relocation; rather, attendants called for maintenance of the filters, the provision of spare parts, availability of the latest equipment and "planting trees around the premises". El-Zo'eri has a word of advice: "I urge you not to overemphasise the environmental aspects of these factories. We are a poor governorate, we are trying to attract investors and we don't want to put off the ones who have come forward."

Emad Abu Zeid, from the Land Centre for Human Rights, however, insists that the intention is not to discourage investors but to ensure that the health of citizens of Beni Suef will not be jeopardised. "We are not against investment; we know that Beni Suef is a governorate with a growing population and high unemployment. There are thousands of job opportunities at stake here. We definitely need investment. But definitely not at the expense of the citizens' health. There is plenty of desert around Beni Suef, with the clay that is used by the cement industry. Why can't they be transferred there instead?" It is urgent to reverse the approval now, before it is too late, he insists. Three of the factories have not yet been set up; as for the other two, they should be compensated for the infrastructure built before they incur even greater losses. The Land Centre for Human Rights is calling upon the Ministry of Environment to intervene to transfer these factories 30km into the desert, and is requesting that the prime minister also intervene and resolve this conflict before the situation escalates further.

The villagers of Ghiyada Al-Sharqiya, understandably, are already uneasy about the fact that one of the factories is only 300 metres away from their homes. The village of 10,000 inhabitants is surrounded by the Nile, agricultural land, the mountain and other villages. Some of the villagers work on the land, while a great many work in nearby quarries or as labourers in Helwan. "Because the land on which we live is so small, we are getting more and more crowded and there is nowhere to go except towards the east, where the factory has taken over the land," says Ahmed Selim. Ahmed Mohamed insists that the villagers didn't want more land for free; they were prepared to pay, but were told that this was government land. Now it has gone to the investors. "Why couldn't they go out into the desert?" he demands.

But the factories are said to represent new job opportunities for the villagers, especially now, when agricultural jobs are limited. Many villagers, however, doubt they will be given these jobs. "They will give them to other people," one of the villagers asserts.

"We are suffocating now," interrupts Karima Abdallah, "but what will happen when the new factory starts spewing fumes? We will be just like those poor people in Helwan." Another villager interjects: "What about the crops? They will suffocate too."

An association working in land reclamation, Al-Kifah Al-Muthmir, has filed a lawsuit against the owners planning to open a cement factory in Gezirat Abu Saleh, on the premise that building a cement factory so close to agricultural land will destroy the crops. "Don't give me this rubbish about high performance filters. We all know what happened to the agricultural land surrounding the factories in Assiut. After all the time and money we spent reclaiming this land, we now risk losing the crops. We will just turn into another Helwan. Of course, the Ministry of Environment has the authority to stop it at any time," a member says angrily.

Magdi Allam from the Ministry of Environment pointed out that the committee investigating the construction of the new factories has not yet issued a final verdict. "The establishment of heavy industries close to human settlements violates not only the new Environment Law but also the military order issued by the prime minister, which stipulates that such industries must be at least 60km away from the nearest settlement," he notes, however. Allam also doubts the filters in question will only release 50mg/square metres of fumes. "This sounds highly improbable. The latest filters we have tested here in the ministry have not released anything less than 250mg/square metres."

Even though filters greatly reduce pollutants in the air, the cumulative effect of the pollutants remains extremely harmful. Apart from the chronic bronchial irritation, nasal inflammation, and shallow respiration that are common ailments among workers in cement industries, plants suffer too, explains Allam. Ideally, factories should be at least 30km apart: "We should avoid density at all costs. We can't repeat the mistakes of the past." Allam, at least, is optimistic; he thinks it likely that the ministry will demand that the factories be relocated.

Mud, sulphur — and smoke

The Capritage Health Spa not only underlines the environmental deterioration of Helwan, but also illustrates the hidden potential a healthy environment can reveal. **Fatemah Farag** visits a spa in the heart of Greater Cairo's most polluted area

"The Capritage is a national treasure," says Dr Hussein El-Qadi, director of the Capritage Health Spa, firmly. At first, his opinion seems to be a bit of an overstatement. A research paper by Dr Gottfried Bohm of the University of Munich on the history of Helwan, however, opens new vistas; one begins to understand what the spa once was and what it could be if it were not for the bulky yellow factories, belching clouds of suffocating smoke, which dot the landscape.

According to Bohm, the Helwan baths were established in the early 500s by King Babylon who had a son named Helwan. Around 670, a plague struck Egypt; only Helwan remained clear of its disastrous effects. This seemingly miraculous salvation made it the headquarters of the rich and powerful.

Helwan's warm weather, bright sun, dry air and, of course, the springs, prompted a group of prominent scientists and doctors to establish an organisation in 1858 with the aim of highlighting the importance of the area for medicine and health in general. Dr Reil, one of the scientists, was the Khedive Ismail's private physician, and soon the initiative resulted in the establishment of the Capritage Health Spa as well as a luxurious hotel and many winter homes for members of the urban elite. In remembrance of the role he played in Helwan, a street in Reil's name provides one of the few reminders of what the town used to be. "When it became state policy under Nasser to industrialise Helwan, no one realised what would happen," sighs El-Qadi, who has worked at the spa for 20 years.

When you turn right off the Corniche into Helwan, you pass signs for a cement factory, a textile factory and even an aeroplane factory before you come to a dilapidated white palace-like structure with the signs "Capritage Swimming Pool" and "Capritage Billiards" on the front and a Ferris wheel in the background. This part of the Capritage was taken over by the Ministry of Tourism, which in turn leased it to a private contractor. Inside, the squalor is a shock. The graceful columns in the main hall have been painted purple and the burgundy tablecloths are cluttered with leftovers among which cats pick their way with disdain. The manager, who asked that his name be withheld, was firm: "Do not ask me about the history of this place or tourism or management. I know about bombs." He drove a tank in the army for 20 years, and is much more forthcoming when it comes to describing various types of weapons and tanks.

The health spa, fortunately, has fared much better, and remains under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Health. "The palace and pool were supposed to be given to us so that we could turn it into a recreation area for the patients," frowns Dr Alaa Abdel-Salam, who works at the spa; "instead, they have turned it into this project, which makes a lot of noise because they are always having disco parties."

The old Capritage building still stands today. The reception area is topped by a handsome dome; the walls are pierced by stained glass windows and decorated with Islamic inscriptions. The high ceilings, arched windows and heavy wooden doors are telling images from the past. Only a few new buildings were put up in the '60s, and what used to be state-of-the-art equipment — praised by German scientists who came to the area early in the century — also remain intact. "These are very sturdy machines and do their job well," notes El-Qadi. The 1992 earthquake left the old buildings full of cracks and an extensive rehabilitation project was undertaken, costing about LE600,000. Despite the new ceramics, however, rusty water pipes and peeling paint give the place away. "The sulphate is very powerful and eats away at metal. We keep what we can still use," explains El-Qadi, who acquiesces that much more money could be spent on the place. In fact, some new plans are in process. "There are plans for another swimming pool," he says, pointing to an empty space from the window of one of the new buildings, which is equipped with an airy gym in which old wooden machines stand next to a few modern exercise contraptions.

As a whole, the spa is very clean. Bright white sheets partition off sections in most of the large halls; nurses in powder-blue uniforms walk to and fro energetically. Small rooms line hushed corridors: some are for massage, some for baths and others for electricity treatments. In one of these, two machines sterilise mud brought from the Ain Al-Sira area and, nearby, a man is unceremoniously slathered with the brown paste, then covered in towels and left to "soak it in". The scene does not quite fit in with the image created by ads for Swiss spas in glossy magazines, but then here, prices are as low as LE2.50. "Our services and facilities are comparable to those in Europe and our prices are at least one hundred times lower," boasts El-Qadi. Every year, he says, 10,000 new patients visit the spa; during the year, 100,000 out-patients, most of whom suffer from various rheumatic ailments, come here for treatment.



photo: Sherif Sonbol

Beneath the palm trees, through the smog: the Capritage

The nucleus of the whole place is, of course, the spring. Bubbling beneath a graceful structure, the spring water is green and smells of rotten eggs. "The worse the smell, the better the water," smiles Alaa Abdel-Salam, who often has trouble convincing his patients to take a dip. The doctors at the Capritage point out that they have the highest quality sulphate water in Egypt. "That is why it is such a shame that the area is so polluted," says El-Qadi.

Although the air quality in Helwan may be disastrous to the health, therefore, the waters of the Capritage remain salubrious. "We have tests carried out every six months and they always confirm the quality of the waters. Part of physical therapy, however, is for the patient to get out in the air and be exposed to the sun," continues El-Qadi, as the cement factories continue to emit clouds of noxious smoke.

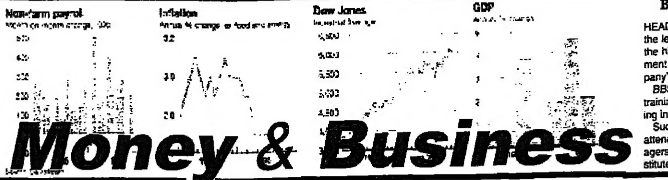
How can the staff at Capritage measure the effects of pollution on their establishment? "Just look at the inflow of patients. When I first came here, there were patients from all over the world, including whole groups from Finland. Now we no longer get that kind of clientele," shrugs El-Qadi. The doctors point out, however, that they still get patients from the Arab world and Africa. "The Capritage is the only spa of its kind in the whole region and that is no small matter," notes Abdel-Salam, adding: "We hope the new law will be effective in cleaning the air in Helwan. If it is successful we have the potential to flourish — magnificently."

Trade with Sudan expected to increase

WHILE the volume of trade between Egypt and Sudan witnessed a steady decline during the period from 1992-1995 due to the the ceasing of protocol activity, falling from LE226 million in 1992 to LE92 in 1995, trade activity began moving upwards to reach LE142 million in 199, and recorded LE98 million in the first half of 1997.

A source at the Commercial Representation Office said that as political and economic ties between the two countries begin to improve, something which the forthcoming period is expected to witness, so too will the amount of commercial activity.

Major Egyptian exports to Sudan are foodstuffs, machinery, transportation equipment, petroleum products and pharmaceuticals.



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The 6th Al-Ahram Exhibition for Computers and Information Technology



Plenty of visitor interest in the ACITEX exhibition

ITS SUCCESS stresses the degree of interest in the language of the century.

The Al-Ahram Management and Computer Centre (AMAC) analyses the questionnaires of visitors.

The interest of sponsors, exhibitors and visitors in the Al-Ahram Exhibition for Computer and Information Technology has become the talk of the town. This has been revealed in the demand for filling out visitor analysis questionnaires which include such information as the visitor's address, job and reasons for the visit. The Al-Ahram Management and Computer Centre (AMAC) then analyses this data and comes up with results which serve the exhibiting company.

From the primary analysis of this data it can be seen that most visitors come to the exhibition to get to know what is on the market. It is also clear from this year's exhibition that there was a large presence of people interested in buying, which reflected in the eagerness of companies and sponsors to book a space for their company for the 1999 exhibition.

Next year's exhibition will also be held in the Cairo International Conference Centre (CICC), as it has proven to be the most suitable for both the International Conference on Artificial Intelligence and the Al-Ahram Exhibition for Computers and Information Technology. There is plenty of parking space at the CICC and the display wings are very well organised.

All the suggestions made by visitors will be taken into account in order to further raise the standard of the exhibitions so as to offer real service to Egyptians eager to use computers and information technology.

We live in a world that moves at a dynamic pace to serve all productive and service sectors as well as citizens in their daily activities. Here's towards even greater success thanks to the interest of exhibitors and public demand.

CeBIT '98 Hannover set for success

IN MARCH 1998, the Hannover Trade Fair Centre will once again be the summit meeting for the international IT industry. CeBIT '98 — taking place between 19-25 March — is the ideal place to find out what is available on the world market and to prepare the ground for major investment decisions. Over the past 27 years, CeBIT has developed into a 'world trade centre' for information technology and an absolute must for decision-makers from all over the globe.

With 364,083 square metres of exhibition space, CeBIT will reassert its status as the world's biggest trade show in 1998. The number of exhibitors is all set to break the 7,200 barrier for the first time. A key motivation for taking part in CeBIT is the unrivalled spectrum of foreign exhibitors and visitors that it attracts — 2,764 of the exhibiting companies will come from outside Germany. Approximately 100,000 foreign visitors attend CeBIT, above all because they can be sure of meeting other highly qualified business professionals from around the globe.

The CeBIT '98 display will be broken down into the following categories: "Information Technology", "Network Computing", "CIM/ADC", "Software, Consulting and Services", "Telecommunications", "Office Automation", "Bank Technology", "Security Equipment/Card Technology" and "Research and Technology Transfer". In terms of display space, "Information Technology" is the largest product category, followed by "Telecommunications" and "Software, Consulting and Services". A key theme at next year's CeBIT will be technology designed for the Internet, intranets and extranets. The latest products and systems in this sector will be featured at the "Internet Park" in Hall 6.

Dr Jorg Shaumberg, chairman of CeBIT Hannover, and Miss Mona El-Mahdi, CeBIT's supervisor, in Cairo's German-Arab Chamber of Commerce during a meeting with Mr Ali Ghoniem, vice chairman of the board, general manager of Al-Ahram Establishment and general manager of AMAC

The line-up of products, systems and services at CeBIT '98 will be augmented by an impressive program of joint presentations: "Software Centre for Small and Medium-Sized Firms" (Hall 4), "ENAC — European Know-How Centre for Local and Central Government" (Hall 6), "World of Media" (Hall 8), "Network Information Centre '98" (Hall 11), "Bank-Finanz-Systeme" (Hall 18), "CefIS — Centre for Information Security" (Hall 23), "Satellite Business" (Hall 26) and the research forum "Meeting Point 22" (Hall 22).

The exhibitors and visitors at CeBIT '98 will also benefit from the upgrading measures being carried out in preparation for EXPO 2000. A prime example is the largest self-supporting exhibition hall in Europe — Hall 13 — which will be devoted entirely to PCs in the coming year. An outstanding feature of this new building is the so-called "Skywalk" — a glazed tunnel linking Laatzen rail station and the western entrance of Hall 13. The Skywalk will facilitate quick and easy access to the Exhibition Grounds for passengers arriving by train. A further new addition will be Hall 24, which houses CAD solutions as well as applications software for architecture, the building industry and facility management.

Deutsche Messe AG is expecting around 600,000 visitors to attend CeBIT '98 and this figure will include a high proportion of trade visitors. Since the creation of CeBIT HOME, the traditional CeBIT Hannover has reasserted its status as a trade show for business users. In 1997 the proportion of business professionals attending CeBIT rose from 76 per cent (1996) to 86 per cent. CeBIT HOME is targeted at SOHO distributors and private users and takes place every two years. The next CeBIT HOME is scheduled for 26-30 August1998.

As in previous years, CeBIT '98 will feature a wide-ranging program of joint displays, conferences, forums and company presentations.

GeoMap Consultants, mapping for oil and gas exploration

GEOMAP CONSULTANTS has recently expanded its activities to cover the area of producing image maps and other geo-information, using SPOT data, for the oil and gas companies.

SPOT and RADAR satellite images are the most suitable and widely used globally for this purpose. The image maps produced using SPOT and RADARSAT data provide the users in the petroleum sector with a valuable tool to use in their exploration activities. Moreover, the high resolution SPOT data and its digital nature offer unique advantages for interpretation, multispectral enhancement and integration with other data sets such as magnetic gravity and seismic reflection profiles.

As a leading company in the field of mapping and remote sensing, GeoMap is already producing such geo-products for a number of oil and gas exploration companies. The range of products includes image maps of scales 1:25,000, 1:50,000 and 1:100,000, in addition to value added products such as classification maps, land-use maps, vector feature maps and Digital Elevation Models.

GeoMap Consultants not only provides the produced maps in digital and hard copy formats, but also the original satellite images and the PCI image processing software used to display and process the digital data.

For further information contact: 13 El-Obour Blds, Salah Salem St, Cairo 11371 Tel: 4026875 Fax: 4038784

Annual festival for individuals of special needs

IN AN attempt to increase public awareness of the needs of one and a half million disabled individuals and to show off their capabilities and skills to society, the Citi Center for Training and Research on Mental Disability, is organising its fifth annual festival for individuals of special needs (mental disability) .

According to Naguib Khazam, the festival, which begins on 3 April, involves a number of activities among which is a marathon for mentally disabled individuals. This marathon will take place on Gamet El-Dewal El-Arabia Street in Mohandessin. It will be followed by a procession to Zamalek Club at which the disabled, their parents and other interested parties, will take part.

Meanwhile, an exhibition of products and a party will be held during the last week of April.

Another activity included in the festival is a performance by the children in one of the theatres. Khazam also announced that the aim of the festival is to enable the mentally disabled to blend into society and to draw a greater interest from society to the issue of disability.

One of the activities of the festival will be inaugurated by Maher Gindi, governor of Giza.

NBE participates in the project of Management & Operation of Petrol Stations

IN LINE with the National Bank of Egypt's (NBE) role in sup[porting small-scale projects and providing new job opportunities for fresh graduates with a view to creating a second breed of young businessmen, the Bank has decided to implement the project of Management & Operation of Petrol Stations, in cooperation with the Social Fund for Development and Oil Cooperative Company. The Fund will furnish a loan of LE3 million (in two instalments) for NBE to be refinanced for the target segment, i.e. fresh graduates. The project provides 300 permanent jobs and 150 indirect job opportunities by establishing 30-35 small-scale projects in the field of marketing petrol services in all governorates, especially those lacking this kind of service or expected to comprise international roads, routes to tourist sites or new urban communities; this is in addition to Canal and Upper Egypt governorates.

In coordination with the governorates, the Oil Cooperative Company will select the locations of the stations, build the necessary facilities and premises and hire the stations out to the beneficiaries. The beneficiary may use the relevant granted loan to cover the cost of accommodating the premises and hire the stations out to the beneficiaries. The beneficiary may use the relevant granted loan to cover the cost of accommodating the premises and purchase oil materials from the company, according to the area and type of station. Moreover, the company will assist the beneficiary in preparing and equipping the site of the station.

Within the framework of the project, the Bank will:

— Take appropriate credit decisions in relation to the projects referred by the project's managing committee.

— Shoulder credit risks.

— Be represented in the steering committee of the project.

— Submit periodical follow-up reports on the moan and the performance of the project to the Fund, and

— Follow up the repayment of the moan.

The maximum loan for financing the working capital, equipment or both amounts to LE50,000 for the individual project and LE200,000 for multi-partner projects, provided that:

— The project is maximum four-partner based.

— The project provides at least five jobs.

— The project is economically viable.

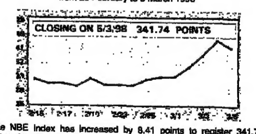
In the case of exceptionally important projects, the lending ceiling may be reasonably raised after ensuring the necessary guarantees, provided that the Fund's prior approval be obtained.

In addition, self-financing of the beneficiary in the total investment cost of the project is estimated at about 10 per cent of the loan, according to the requirements of the project.

Grace periods and repayment of working capital loans as well as loans for financing the purchase of equipment are determined according to the nature of the project and the required period for the turnover of capital and the cash flow. Any loan will not exceed five years, including grace periods, provided that a soft interest of 7 per cent will be paid during the grace period.

National Bank of Egypt

A weekly update on the NBE securities Market Index from 26 February to 5 March 1998

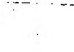


The NBE Index has increased by 8.41 points to register 341.74 points for the week ending 5/3/1998 against 333.33 points for the week ending 26/2/1998.

4 largest increases and decreases:

Company	Change %
Alex. Flour Mills	+12.8
Giza General Con. & Real Estate Inv. Co	+10.1
Upper Egypt Flour Mills	+8.1
Credit Int. d'Egypte	+5.1

Company	Change %
Orient Linen & Cotton	-10.6
Al Ahram Beverages	-6.8
Kafr Al Zaiat Chemicals Co.	-3.4
E.P.C.O	-1.6



Take two

Zamalek's volleyball team retained the league title for the second time running, reports **Abeer Anwar**

Zamalek's volleyball team has seen some hard times, placing only third in last year's African Clubs Championship held in Cairo, then going through a reshuffle when its coach was fired. The new coach, former Zamalek player Abdel-Moeti Mansour, and his assistant, Ahmed Abdel-Daim, knew it would be an uphill struggle if Zamalek was to repeat as league champions. They also knew what they had to do: inject some badly needed confidence into their players. Apparently, the change of coach was just what the doctored ordered. This week, Zamalek won its second consecutive league title and, better still, at the expense of Ahli, the team Zamalek loves to beat.

After playing in the round-robin format, Zamalek won the first tournament in Alexandria, brushing aside all its opponents, including arch-rivals Ahli, 3-2. The second round proved more difficult. Ahli sought revenge and got it, blanking Zamalek 3-0 in a little under an hour. Both teams ended up with 19 points, paving the way for a decisive final game.

The missions were clear. Ahli was hoping to recapture the title while Zamalek's goal was to repeat as champions. For over two hours, the two enthralled their respective fans who filled the indoor halls of Cairo Stadium in what many observers believed was one of the best matches ever played between the two.

The first set saw Ahli get off to a quick start and, using the experience of its players and riding the excellent playmaking talents of Maged Mustafa, it never looked back, finishing 15-13.

During the changeover, Mansour advised his players to keep their cool. "Survival in this match will depend on the calmest players, not just the fittest," he said. The players obviously took Mansour's words to heart and took the second set, winning handily 15-8.

Momentum had swung Zamalek's way. With captain Nehad Shehata inspiring his younger players and Mahmoud Abdel-Aziz providing the offense, Zamalek made a mockery of the next two sets, crushing Ahli 15-1 and 15-3, winning the game 3-1 and the league's trophy.

Following the match, shell-shocked Ahli coach, Ibrahim Abdel-Qader, was in disbelief. "I could not believe my eyes that these are the players I have been training for years. They lost hope easily and early, although all of them play for the national team."

On the other side of the net, it was a joyous day for Zamalek, reviving visions of the team's glory days. It was a particularly satisfying win for its new coach. "I am very pleased with the players' performance," said Mansour. "I'm also happy that I was able to succeed in such a short time."

The players celebrated their victory in Zamalek club until late at night. Zamalek President Dr Kamal Darwish gave each player LE10,000 in bonus money. The players also took a deserved but short-lived holiday. After only two days, they went straight back to training camp in preparation for the African Clubs Championship, scheduled to start in Tunisia 18 March.



Zamalek's Shehata and Abdel-Aziz blocking Ahli's Safi's shot *photo: Ayman Ibrahim*

Shaking their basket

With just three weeks to go before the beginning of the round-robin tournaments, the basketball league is still a riot of white, red, green, blue and yellow T-shirts. **Nashwa Abdel-Tawab** gets her head in a spin

The colour of the T-shirt is usually cause for the fans to cheer one team rather than another. But in this week's league matches, all the colours seemed for once united around a team that believe in hope, and in success, and work for it.

In the final stages of the basketball league, before the beginning of the two imminent round-robin tournaments, the competition has been fierce, with upsets that have astounded both basketball experts and fans.

It's normal there should be antagonism between the white castle of Zamalek and their red rivals Ahli. Zamalek had been top of the league with 26 points, with Ahli trailing on 24, but this week the two teams drew level after Ahli won an important match against Gezira. Ittihad of Alexandria are lying third with 23 points after their unexpected defeat by the Arab Contractors. Gezira are fourth with 18 points and Arab Contractors fifth with 15 points.

In a very close and tightly-fought match, Ahli persisted to beat Gezira 78-75, despite their opponents' overwhelming control of the game at the outset. Double faults, uncompleted passes and silly mistakes thwarted Gezira's efforts to cruise to victory in this match, and with it, the league. Thus Ahli is now level on points with Zamalek, but Zamalek, last year's League and Cup winners and top-seeded team in this current league, still have an easy match in hand and are expected to finish the week still in first place.

Prize for the most ridiculous game of the week went to that between Ittihad of Alexandria and Arab Contractors. Arab Contractors' 70-68 victory was a great blow to all their opponents' players and fans. Ittihad was dreaming of regaining the league title after last year's loss, but this unnecessary defeat has effectively put paid to those hopes. The Alexandrians appeared over-confident and arrogant against a team that haven't won a single match in their 14 previous fixtures. The Contractors, on the other hand, came out having accepted they could never win, but prepared to work hard. Putting their trust in hope, they have begun to perform well over the course of the extended 42-match league, despite their players' lack of experience. They found themselves tied on 62-62 at the end of the second period, and after five minutes' extra time, they had won 70-68, thus teaching Ittihad and all the other teams, the experts and the fans, an important lesson: that victory lies in hope and toil, not pretension and predestination.

Return to reality

Forget about the international glamour game. Time to come down to earth with the national League and its distinctly limited attractions.

Before Egypt's joy at their never-truly-believed-in African victory had dissipated, the first week of the second round of the national soccer league burst in on the national consciouness with seven sobering matches, **Nashwa Abdel Tawab** watched.

Cast your mind back if you will for a moment to round one of this year's competition. We have already witnessed 277 goals, 23 red cards and 31 penalty kicks. The Arab Contractors scored the most goals — 29 — followed by Ahli with 24. The weakest attacking team was Qena with only 8 goals. Abdel-Nasser Mohamed of Arab Contractors and Ahmed Sari of Ittihad of Alexandria were the top scorers with 11 goals each. In contrast, Hossam Hassan, top scorer of the African Nation Cup, has only scored two goals.

The first round also saw the disappearance of many stars, either through resignation, as with Ahli's goalkeeper Ahmed Shobeir or Zamalek's striker Ayman Mansour, or through their leaving to play as professionals with Arab teams abroad.

Ahli are currently top of the League with 40 points. Ismaili is second with 32 points, ahead of Zamalek who also have 32 points on goal difference. Ahli's match against Shams was well below par: Hossam Hassan didn't score, and nor did he show his talent for quick passing combinations with Omara as he had done in Burkina Faso. Sayed Abdel-Hafiz and Mohamed Youssef scored two goals for Ahli nevertheless, but it was a slow-motion match against a weak team. Both goals came in the first half, after which the spectators were condemned to forty-five minutes of more or less total boredom.

To add to a tedious series of league fixtures, Ittihad of Alexandria drew negatively with Masri at Port Said Stadium. After their victory in the Egypt Cup, Masri disappointed their fans with a totally lacklustre game.

On the other hand, Zamalek's match against Mansoura, which they won 4-1, was quite thrilling. They wasted at least seven chances to score through the inexperience of the players. Osama Nabih (2), Tawfik Saqr, Abdel-Hamid Bassiouni scored for Zamalek, while Walid Salah got one back for Mansoura. The match was dominated by Zamalek throughout, and if they continue to play at this level, they could well snatch the league from Ahli, whose current form is well below average.

Ismaili vs Qena was quite a good match too, but marred by irritable decisions from the referee. Under the sole leadership of Ismail Hefni for the first time, Ismaili drew 1-1 with Qena after a strong performance in which many chances were lost through poor finishing. Hamada El-Gamal scored for Ismaili. Tarek Fahim then cut through the Ismaili defence, and while he struck the bar, the rebound fell to Essam Salah who didn't hesitate to put it away for Qena. In the second half the referee, Mohamed Diaa, became very nervous and tense and his decisions began to irritate the players. As the tension mounted, two Ismaili players were shown the red card, Safan El-Saghir, the goalkeeper, and Mohamed Salah Abou Gresha, together with Sami Mahmoud of Qena. Diaa also yellow-carded both Ahmed Sami of Ismaili and Essam Salah of Qena. Despite these setbacks, Ismaili still managed to finish the day in second place on 32 points.

El-Menia beat Baladiat El-Mahala 1-0 thanks to Alaa Ibrahim who made a long solo run from the centre of the field to score a fatal goal only eight minutes into the first half. There was a similar victory at Ghazl El-Mahala stadium, where El-Mahala under their new coach Omar Abdallah beat Aswan 1-0 in a fast-moving game, Abdel-Latif El-Domani scoring in the last minute of the first half. Suez also won a deserved 2-1 victory over Ittihad Othman as both teams put up a strong performance. Tamer Bagato, Suez's key player, set up two perfect goals for Yasser Mohamed, and that was it, though Said Saad still managed to squeeze some compensation out for Ittihad Othman at the very end of the second half.

Edited by **Inas Mazhar**

Al-Ahram: A *Diwan* of contemporary life



In the last colonial conquest of an Arab country before World War I, Italy invaded Libya in 1911. The occupation was a classic example of the European colonial onslaught on Arab and African countries. The usual pretexts, including the need to protect European minority communities, were brandished in diplomatic warnings followed by ultimatums. But advance reconnaissance by Italy in Libya indicated that Rome was really after Libyan agricultural and mineral wealth. A unique feature marked the Italian military offensive — aerial bombing which was probably the first use of aircraft in the history of warfare. **Dr Yunan Labib Rizk** recounts the events leading up to the invasion and the start of military operations on the basis of reports published by *Al-Ahram*



Illustration: Makram Henein

The Italian occupation of Libya in 1911-12 was the last chapter in the colonialist invasion of the Arab world before World War I. Although the occupation has been treated at length in many historical studies, a reading of contemporary issues of *Al-Ahram* offers the opportunity to see the classic pattern of colonial aggression unfold with dramatic immediateness.

Readers of modern Egyptian history may recall the story of the Maltese trader and the Egyptian donkey driver that precipitated the Alexandrian riots on 11 June 1882, which served as the pretext for the British Navy to bombard Alexandria. An earlier precedent can be found in the history of the French colonial enterprise in Algeria where, in 1830, the ruler of Algeria supposedly struck the French consul, paving the way for the invasion by French forces.

In Libya, in 1911, the first pretext for the Italian invasion was to be found in *Al-Mirsad*, a small, relatively obscure newspaper published in Tripoli. The newspaper featured an article attacking Italy, prompting the Italians to dispatch a warship to the Libyan coast. "Reports on this article distress us and make us laugh at the same time," commented *Al-Ahram*. "If they are true, the article is cause for heightened tensions. On the other hand, *Al-Mirsad* does not have the stature, even among the people of Tripoli, that could render its attack against the honour of the Italian nation worth treating as an excuse for a military response."

The second pretext came in the form of a series of stories, most likely fabricated, that caused friction between Rome and Istanbul. *Al-Ahram's* account of these stories appeared under the headline, "They said...", clearly indicative of the scepticism of its editors. *Al-Ahram* writes: "They said that an Italian girl living in Tripoli converted to Islam in order to marry a Muslim youth. The Italian consul demanded that the young man's family turn the girl over to the consulate on the grounds that she was under age, but the family refused. The people in Tripoli demonstrated in protest and sent urgent appeals to the government of Istanbul to stand firm against the Italians and send reinforcements to Tripoli. They also spoke of the harsh language against the Italians in the Istanbul press and they said that Ottoman ships have intercepted an Italian vessel off the coast of Yemen because it was smuggling arms." Again *Al-Ahram* argued that even if these stories were true they would not merit the mobilisation of Italian forces against Tripoli.

The third pretext was even odder. Official Italian sources claimed that the Ottoman government had usurped Libya from its true rulers and were keeping them in hiding. Italy, the sources said, merely wanted to restore them to power. Apparently, according to the narrative in the Italian press, officials in Rome had concluded an agreement with the Quramanli family to restore them to power in Tripoli under an Italian protectorate. According to *Al-Ahram*, however, "the last member of this family, Youssef Pasha, abdicated the emirate in 1830 and 50 years later, the Supreme Porte appointed another governor." Subsequent events proved that no such agreement between Rome and that family existed.

Reconnaissance constitutes another important phase in colonial encroachment. Gertrude Bell in Iraq, Alfred Blunt in Egypt, Colonel Lawrence (of Arabia) are names only too familiar to readers of the history of the Middle East under British colonialism. In Libya, it was a German traveller known as Rolf who performed this role. In a lengthy report he submitted to the Italian prime minister, a portion of which was published in *Al-Ahram*, he wrote, "Tripolitania and Cyrenaica form an integral whole; what one lacks the other provides. Cyrenaica has large granaries and Tripolitania can be equipped for large-scale agriculture. Contrary to the common belief that this country is barren desert, the land is very fertile and has the capacity to bear considerable fruit."

Rolf continues, "Cyrenaica produces an average of 10 to 12 million francs worth of wheat and barley per year and grain exports could bring in 30 million francs. The soil in Tripolitania is more fertile than that of Tunisia, where the Sicilians have done wonders, and that in Egypt. Tripolitania is also wealthy in lead, iron and other minerals. The Libyan Arab is a strong and industrious worker, intelligent, peaceful and fond of the land. He is very similar to the Sicilians working in Tunisia. All the inhabitants carry arms and are capable of holding out for long periods against an organised army. It is difficult to land troops in Libya because the port of Tripoli, like the port in Benghazi, is too shallow and any strong winds would cause the ships to run against the shoals." For its part, *Al-Ahram* adds the geographical detail that western Libya (Tripolitania), covering 1,050,000 square kilometres, has three times the land area of Italy.

Before embarking on its campaign, officials in the Italian Ministry of War heard the report of a team of officers who had been sent to the port of Tripoli to conduct further reconnaissance. The officers reported, "It would take no more than a force of 15,000 soldiers to occupy Tripoli."

In phase three — setting the fuse — colonial powers have resorted to very similar means. One, the accusation of fanaticism was always a ready weapon. Certainly anyone familiar with Egyptian history knows how frequently the British wielded it against the leaders of the nationalist movement. More significantly, protecting minorities and foreigners from "fanaticism" was a primary cornerstone in the British argument for keeping its hold on Egypt.

On 27 September 1911, *Al-Ahram* reports that the chargé d'affairs of the Italian Embassy in Istanbul submitted a strongly worded memorandum to the Ottoman Ministry of Foreign Affairs stating that Italy "protests the threat to the Italian community in Tripolitania emanating from the fanaticism of the Muslim inhabitants and the Ottoman officers and soldiers."

The following day, the Maltese residents of the city, who were actually British subjects, sounded the same tune. They sent a petition to the governor of Malta asking for protection, particularly as Italian ships were already in the process of evacuating Italian subjects, while "British subjects raised the British flag on their homes."

A contemporary Reuters release said that at the beginning of the crisis there had been no more than 300 Italians in Tripolitania. Another 300 people were entitled to Italian protection under the capitulations system. Most of these were Jewish businessmen in the port. Curiously, the number of British dependents was 10 times the number of Italian dependents and consisted primarily of approximately 3,000 Maltese and some Jews who enjoyed British protection.

The sense of panic that had beset Tripolitania was intense. "Religious leaders and soldiers in Tripoli are in a state of alert. The zealous masses are marching through the streets shouting, 'down with the Italians!' As anti-Italian agitation increases, the Italian consul is attempting to calm the situation. As droves of Italian citizens depart for Malta, the remainder await with ebbing patience the arrival of Italian warships to protect them." Ottoman authorities issued instructions to their governor in Tripoli to safeguard the lives of foreigners, and Italians in particular. However, Italian propaganda, blazoning "fanaticism threatens Italian lives" had lit the fuse and no efforts on the part of Istanbul to defuse the situation would deflect the colonial power from pouncing on its prey.

The final phase of the Italian encroachment also conformed to type in the escalating severity of diplomatic language in its missives to Istanbul. At first "strongly-worded" warnings were issued by the Italian government, protesting "the imminent danger threatening the Italian community in Tripolitania as a result of the fanaticism of the Muslims whose zealotry has mounted since the arrival of Ottoman soldiers and officers." It would not be long before such warnings were stepped up to ultimatum. On 26 September, the Italian government delivered an ultimatum. True to form, it said the government of Istanbul had not complied with repeated Italian requests to put an end to the misgovernment and negligence in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, a matter it viewed with great concern, "not only because of the proximity of Libya to Italian shores, but because of the threat this poses to the Italian projects in those areas." After once again restating at length its concern for the lives of Italians "and all other foreigners of diverse nationalities," as a result of "popular agitation," it got to the point: "As the Italian government finds itself compelled to defend its honour and its interests, it has decided to occupy militarily."

Naturally, the Italian government never expected the Ottomans to comply with the ultimatum. After all, it only gave Istanbul a 24-hour deadline. Nevertheless, in a last-ditch attempt to seek a stay of execution, the Supreme Porte denied that there had been any threat directed against the Italian commercial projects in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, "at least during the previous three years." In order to appease the Italian government, it reminded it that Istanbul had sought to conclude with Rome "an agreement which would offer economic concessions that would greatly extend the scope of Italian activities in those quarters." Finally, it asserted that there was not "the least reason to fear for the lives of Italians and foreigners residing in Libya." Such assertions, of course, were in vain.

Even though the Italian attack seemed a foregone conclusion, a segment of Arab and Ottoman opinion still held out hopes for peace, particularly after two days had elapsed after the deadline without an attack. Turkish newspapers grabbed at the straw of optimism, announcing that "negotiations between Italy and Turkey are still in progress." And three days later *Al-Ahram* announced that "the Supreme Porte still cherishes hopes for peace and is continuing its diplomatic drive to seek the intervention of foreign powers in order to reach a peaceful solution and to deflect Italy from its thievery."

Hopes for intervention were pinned on two countries in particular: Germany and the US. But these hopes were dashed as German mediation failed and the US refused to intervene.

The Ottomans had no alternative but to fight. The odds were definitely against them. On 11 October *Al-Ahram* said that the Ottoman garrison in Tripolitania was far less than former accounts had depicted and that there were only 6,000 infantrymen, 5,000 cavalry and 20 cannons. The forces were doomed to collapse before the greater firing power of the European coloniser. Moreover, this invasion was marked by probably the first use of aerial bombing in the history of warfare, which naturally precipitated panic in the ranks of the Ottoman forces. The end result, of course, was that another Arab country fell to a colonial invader. *Al-Ahram* found itself only able to find solace in François I's famous words, "We have lost everything but our honour." Honour, in Libya's case, would have to be saved through the resistance of the Arab people, led not by the Ottomans, the Germans or the Americans, but by such national heroes as Omar Al-Mukhtar.



The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.

Ragai Wanis:

Portrait of the artist

Eyes of vinegar, the soul of a vagabond, a brush like a sword: saint and healer, exile and cynic

I saw Wanis for the first time when he was a student at the Faculty of Fine Arts. He was walking around campus with dishevelled hair, a bewildered look in his eyes, a cheerful, self-restrained revolutionary who laughed cynically at life and human beings.

I made his acquaintance as I walked into the library one morning to read about the master painters (Velasquez, Rembrandt and Holbein) whose names had been dropped by Bicar in one of his lectures. One, two, three leaves from a sketchbook were being pushed around the table at which we sat. The students shoved the sketches towards me. I glimpsed him after that, all alone, biting the pen which had produced the sketches.

The sketches were a web of meaningless, absurd lines. The faces of colleagues, however, peeped back at us from the paper, vivid, sarcastic and funny. A compassionate pen had sketched them. Among the faces, I espied my own.

As I gazed into the distance, I saw him at the other end of the long table which seats scores of students. He was like a tree which had suddenly sprung up in full bloom, its trunk towering high and its branches outstretched, studded with violet lilies which seemed like the locks of his hair, twisted and curled like coils of wire.

I leapt from my seat, kicking it aside and took a place amidst the friends who carried his caricatures for him. I walked up to him, kissed him and took him to Abul-Einein, the famous artist at *Rose El-Youssef*. We worked together day and night, for long years, in an old apartment, the atelier where some of Egypt's masters had produced their masterpieces: Saroukhan, Refqi, Rakha, Abdel-Samie and Zohdi.

He became the epicentre, the heart, the bitterest and sweetest member of our group. At the time, we painted with our pens, brushes, fingers, noses, beards and locks of hair; we slept on our benches, before our easels. Abul-Einein went to and fro, carrying our paintings to the printshop or bringing them back for us to work on. Among Abul-Einein's students were Salah Jahin, Bahgat, Ihab, El-Leithi, Nagui, El-Labbad and myself; later, Raouf, Gomaa... The most important, of course, was Ragai Wanis.

Students at the Institute of Arabic Music visited our atelier. They sat around us and sang, then we all went out until dawn. With us were Zakariya El-Heggawi, Ihsan Abdel-Quddous, Ahmed Bahaeddin, Louis Greiss and Salah Jahin. As the voices of the singers filled the air, we may have caught the melody's infection, for our brushes began to move in step with the music. Perfect harmony. With us were Sayed Mekkawi, Abdel-Halim Hafez, Kamal El-Tawil...

The vagabond painter, this globe-trotter, wandered from one continent to the other. He lived for a while in Japan, in France, and in several other countries, but settled in Australia, in self-inflicted exile. It proved to be no exile, though, for he won it over.

During his debate with Dr Mustafa Mahmoud about secularism and faith, he sketched his interlocutor. They are old friends: when they played chess together, Wanis threatened his king.

The excruciating experience of 1967 was a point of departure for both men. Mahmoud withdrew into his own self but Wanis withdrew into nature.

Both succeeded in finding themselves: a veritable achievement. The artist found his full freedom from within himself and from the outside world; the thinker found his full freedom only from within, and became locked within himself.

He came home to Cairo one day to find that all his family members had gone. His one remaining uncle had just died. His sister's house is in Beni Sueif. Thus, with no roof for the night, he went to sleep in the Mosque of Mustafa Mahmoud.

With his brush, he registered the ills of society, depicted the faces of ministers, board members, film stars, pop singers, prominent writers and dramatists. A few of his prominent subjects are Magda, Hind Rustum, Faiza Ahmed, Zubaida Tharwat, Leila Rustum. All complained to his editors-in-chief: Ahmed Bahaeddin, Fathi Ghanem, Louis Greiss.

The subject of the painting may be stretched, curved or modified. It may be extended beyond all proportion, to evoke a smile, or to convey some meaning. He analyses the features, and chooses the most conspicuous characteristic as the key to his portrait. He embarks on his work focusing on this key, a nose or spectacles, a tooth or an ear.

For Wanis, working in the papers was a valuable learning opportunity. While I went to Paris, Wanis I travelled around the world, to start the second episode of his life as Wanis II.

Wanis II is the wanderer who settled for a quarter of a century in Australia. His experience there cost him his sarcasm. He devoted himself to helping people with psychological problems and people with congenital or other handicaps.

Wanis II used art to work miracles. Painting became a healing process. He ordered paraplegics to stand up and paint, and the world watched as his patients complied.

Wanis II has become a psychologist. Can art cause depression to evaporate? This question dominated his mind during the early stage of his emigration. Alleviating the suffering of others became a goal he pursued relentlessly, with a dedication worthy of monks or saints.

As an adventurer, an exile working in exile, he naturally faced difficult situations. He was surrounded by depression, but always managed to keep his smile — a real hero.

He had a nightmare one night, though. A new patient, a hulk of a man, was in the throes of a fit, breaking everything around him. Wanis dreamed that he lifted the giant up in his arms and threw him out of the window.

But the next day, he woke up as energetic as always. He took up his brush, and holding it upright like a flower, a harp or an olive branch, went to the hospital, to meet his patients.

Wanis II is a saint or a hermit living on an island which fell off our planet. The island is Australia, a virgin land, of indescribable pristine beauty. He took his patients on his daily flights from sunrise to sunset. They descended to the valleys, to the thickets and bushes, where the branches and stems of trees intertwined, birds twittered and kangaroos hopped around. All this beauty is reflected in the lakes and rivers flowing by.

He said to them, "Life is beautiful, let us paint it together. I am no teacher. I will simply guide you, watch your strokes on the canvas, you will manage to hold your paint brushes even though your arms or fingers do not always do your bidding.

"This time we will travel into the depths of the external world, but next time, we will journey into ourselves, to probe our souls. We must assume that you are not ill, handicapped, or mentally retarded, nor is your tongue tied by the stroke you have suffered. The words will flow from your lips, once your brush has expressed new meanings on canvas!"

As an immigrant, Wanis II did not feel an alien for long. He soon made a new circle of friends, a mosaic of nationalities. From sunrise to sunset, he set out on his daily journey into the human self, into the soul, spirit and conscience. The members of his new family were all those who suffered.

His has been a long journey. It lasted 25 years.

Every day, he prayed with the group of sufferers. Day after day, he rigorously performed the rites of the early session. He abided by the words of St Paul in his epistle to the Corinthians.

Ragai Wanis, my lifelong friend, wrote to me from Chianti. He told me he was staying with a friend who had been his patient in Australia. "My friend manages a coffee shop and restaurant, and I am overjoyed to see him. I gave him your address in Paris, and he may visit some time... I am not a guest here in his house: this is my home in Italy."

But traumatic experiences may stifle the sweetest of aspirations. The suicide of a friend shatters one completely. One grieves as never before. A possible consolation is that his disease was incurable.

In Australia, Wanis II felt the pangs of nostalgia for his homeland. He yearned for his childhood friends, the companions of his early years as a novice artist, and exhibitions in Cairo. His nostalgia was exacerbated by the letters sent by his friends, Ihab, Bahgat, Abul-Einein, Louis Greiss, Mustafa Mahmoud, Salah Jahin... and me.

Writing home was a nocturnal activity. His letters to his friends contained not only his views but also sketches and even paintings. The papers were all carefully folded and placed in envelopes. He coloured and decorated the envelopes as well. Each of us kept a file of his letters. Across from his signature, he would carefully jot: "Not for publication".

Ihsan Abdel-Quddous visited Australia once. He stayed with Wanis. Wanis was over the moon at playing host to his friend, teacher and editor-in-chief. "For him," remembered Abdel-Quddous, "it was like Egypt had come to stay at his house."

When he came to visit me in Paris, he was overwhelmed by a nostalgia he had repressed for years. He began to look forward to a brighter future. He brought along his video camera and filmed my work and our tours together in the museums and streets of Paris. He constantly spoke about his experience in using art to heal the handicapped of depression. It was fascinating.

It was during this visit that I discovered Wanis II. I introduced him to a Japanese painter who lived in the same neighbourhood in Paris. Our evenings were vibrant with conversation. Wanis spoke Japanese, which he had learned en route to Australia.

Wanis is back in Egypt. He was very excited when I took him to the *Al-Ahram Weekly* offices. He sat at the desk of an old friend, from our days of journalistic innocence. Then I ordered him to sit still for a few minutes. I took a brush from the paint box, and brandished it like a sword. "I will sketch your portrait now, you greatest of cynics!"

Ragai Wanis, or Wanis I, seems to have been another person, who at times dominated the artist and at others was ignored. Wanis I was a saint, a hermit or, better still, an unconventional Renaissance artist. Now one is won over by his well-groomed demeanour. But before long, it becomes clear that his appearance has deceived. The other person within him stirs and rebels.

When he is about to deceive you, he watches you with his inner eyes. Once he takes up the pen to sketch you, you immediately discover the deception. Bitterness and sarcasm flow from his brush. He moistens it with rain water or aquarelles, or immerses it in a cup where dregs of tea or coffee have settled.

As the blue ink begins to rip through the sheer whiteness of the paper, a satirical poem unfolds. The clear blue turns into an acrimonious violet, as though the water had turned to vinegar. This acerbity transforms your own face — or sees it for the first time.

Profile by **George Bahgory**

Pack of Cards

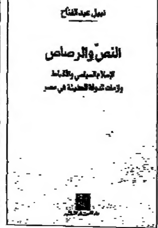
by Madame Sosostris

♥ One of the traditions Al-Ahram Organisation is proud of maintaining is its active participation in the annual ceremonies organised by the Egyptian Armed Forces to honour the martyrs of the War of Attrition. This year, the exhibition of artistic works by war veterans and members of the martyrs' families, which takes place on the anniversary of the death of Chief of Staff **Abdel-Moneim Riad**, killed in combat on 9 March 1969, was officially opened in the lobby of the Al-Ahram building by Major-General **Farouk Abul-Enein**, adviser to the minister of defence. The guests, including high-ranking officials, members of the Armed Forces, families and friends of the martyrs and a number of Al-Ahram journalists, were welcomed by **Ali Ghoneim**, deputy chairman and general manager of Al Ahram Organisation.

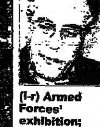
♠ Well, darlings, you must have surmised by now that I am not adverse to dabbling in intellectual matters these days, and just recently my *bas bleu* mood suddenly descended upon me when I happened to see my good friend **Nabil Abdel-Fattah**'s new book, *The Text and the Bullet, Political Islam and the Copts: (Modern National Crises in Egypt)*. It is all about religion and politics and is very, very clever. And mind you, I am not the only one to think that book makes for fascinating reading: Nabil has the honour of being the first Egyptian author who has had a book published by the Lebanese Dar El-Nahar Publishing House.

♣ I keep my artistic eye trained on the beautiful things in life, as you know, and I have discovered the works of a French artist who lives in Menufiya — when he is not exhibiting his photographs in the Sony Gallery at the American University in Cairo, that is. I am talking about **Bernard Guillot**, of course, and his exhibition *A Fertile Land*, which so richly describes our verdant countryside. You may have seen his paintings, but Bernard likes to try different things at different times and this time it is through the eye of his camera that you will see the landscape.









(l-r) Armed Forces' exhibition; *The Text and the Bullet*; Bernard Guillot; Sami Khashaba

♦ My good friend **Sami Khashaba**, head of the theatre organisation of the Ministry of Culture, who enjoys nothing more than encouraging young people in their artistic endeavours, will be very busy this evening with the opening of an exhibition of drawings and photography at the wonderful Tali'a Theatre. The works are those of five young talents from the Faculty of Fine Arts and the American University in Cairo, namely **Rania Fuad**, **Nisrin Ibrahim**, **Abeer Fathi**, **May Mustafa** and **Ali Nabil**.

